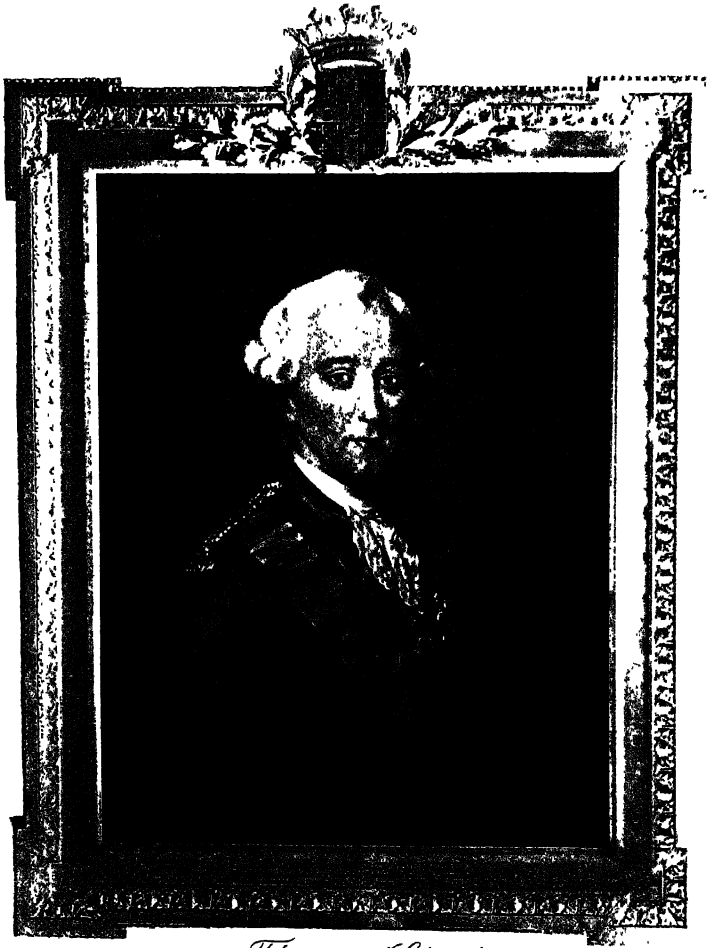
THE GUARDIAN OF MARIE ANTOINETTE

VOLUME II

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Comte de Mercy-Argenteau.

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Chamberlain and Privy Councillor of His Imperial and Royal Majesty.
Ambassador to the Court of France.
Governor General of the Netherlands.

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THE GUARDIAN OF MARIE ANTOINETTE

LETTERS FROM THE COMTE DE MERCY-ARGENTEAU, AUSTRIAN AMBASSADOR TO THE COURT OF VERSAILLES, TO MARIE THÉRÈSE, EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA

1770—1780

BY

LILLIAN C. SMYTHE

ILLUSTRATED WITH NUMEROUS PORTRAITS, PHOTOGRAPHS, FACSIMILE LETTERS, ETC.

VOLUME II

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THE GUARDIAN OF MARIE ANTOINETTE

CHAPTER I

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THE scurryings at Court, like those in an ant-heap opened to the day, are ended by the date of the first letter that Marie Antoinette, as Queen, writes to Marie Thérèse. All the busy whisperers have gone; some straight off into the darkness of banishment; some still wait near to learn if there is a place for them in the new scheme of things. France is waiting too, her population duly counted, its total hidden in strict secrecy, lest haply the people learn its own sheer weight of

numbers. In secret this numbering of the people is taken (its result is to be seen to-day in a manuscript of 1777, in the British Museum); and the subjects of Louis XVI. are twenty-two millions, eight hundred and eighty-seven thousand, three hundred and fifty-seven souls. But the only subjects who count are those who cluster round the Court; the rest are but ciphers in the addition that reckons heads as subjects—of poll-tax. In these twenty-two millions there is not one peasant, however abject and mean, who can escape the honouring and nicely-adjusted notice of the law. There are burdens suited thoughtfully to every back; there are tithes, and land taxes, and property taxes, poll-tax, hut-tax, tolls, the *gabelle*, the *corvée*, and services of every feudal ingenuity, designed to squeeze from these millions a sufficiency of just and righteous tribute ("the forced slavery and taxes are *presque consacrés par l'ancienneté*," said Advocate-General de Séguier in Paris Parliament in 1776) for those privileged to spend without producing. There are no taxes for the *noblesse*, none for the clergy. It is the privilege of the peasant only, to pay or be hanged; to starve on boiled grass, with the prospect of a whipping if he snare a rabbit; the while grants of free shooting over the Royal preserves are showered indiscriminately by Mademoiselle Guimard, the dancer at the Opéra, upon whom Louis XV. had bestowed a pension of 1,500 francs after a little ballet given by Madame du Barry, she responding to this grace by: "It will just serve to pay my stage candle-snuffer!"

But all is to be changed now that the *Bien-aimé* is dead. Bread is already lowered in price; largesse adroitly distributed; and the chief commission-taker from the farmers of monopolies is already at Rueil, expecting to be ordered still further away from a virtuous King and Queen who loathe the very surname she bears.

Marie Antoinette writes from Choisy four days after the death of the King: "My dear mother, Mercy will have told you the circumstances. . . . Happily the cruel illness left the King's mind clear till the very last, and his end was very edifying. The new King seems to have won the hearts of his people. Two days before the death of grandpapa he distributed 200,000 francs [£8,000] to the poor, which produced a great effect. Since the death he has not ceased to work; and to answer with his own hand ministers whom he cannot yet see; and he writes many other letters. This is at least certain—he has a turn for economy, and a great desire to make his subjects happy. In everything he has as much wish as he has need to teach himself. I hope that God will bless his good intention. The public expects many changes at this moment. The King has contented himself with sending that creature [Madame du Barry] to the convent, and with driving out from the Court every one who bears that surname of scandal. The King, in fact, found it necessary to give this example to the people at Versailles, who, even at the time of the illness, were

Choisy, 14 May, 1774.

truckling to Madame de Mazarin, one of the most humble of the favourite's servants. They beg me to preach toleration to the King on behalf of a number of corrupt souls, who have committed very much evil in past years; and I am much inclined to do so."

The Duchesse de Mazarin brought the dukedom to her husband, who was already Duc de Villequier; she was a curious personality, *manqué partout*, as was said of the Duc de Nivernais. She was beautiful, yet unable to attract; generous, yet always considered mean; good at heart, yet always showing apparent ill-nature; witty, yet despised; full of common sense, and always involving herself in difficulties; and possessed of a genius for the inappropriate. She never seized the right moment: she was the friend of the de Choiseuls until shortly before the fatal illness of Louis XV.; she then forsook de Choiseul and *proffered* her friendship to the favourite [becoming, as was said, an 'understudy']; and thus was swept out with the broom, with which, in Madame du Deffant's words, they were "sweeping the Court, and when they have finished they will replace the ornaments."

Marie Antoinette's letter continues: "They have just come to forbid my going to see my aunt Adélaïde, who is in a high fever accompanied with much pain; it is feared it is the smallpox. I shiver, and dare not think what may happen; it is terrible enough for her to pay so soon the price of her sacrifice."

The one great pious act of Mesdames met its



THE DUCHESSE DE MAZARIN.

(*From the miniature at the Château d'Argenteau.*)

[*Page* 366.



THE DUC DE CHOISEUL.

(*From the miniature at the Château d'Argenteau.*

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swift fate. All sickened of the awful disease; but whether the unusually strong Bourbon constitution, or a sense of bland duty fulfilled, or a desire for future power, was the reason, they all recovered, to the expressed regret of unsympathetic Paris, who offered up wishes that they might go as soon as possible and join "*le feu Roi*." Madame du Deffant writes of them on 2 June: "The Angel of Death has sheathed his sword; we shall still see these three old maids ruling the young Court by intrigue; and they will have rendered themselves so interesting that they cannot be given anything less than the kingdom to upset."

"The King has left me at liberty to choose for myself the new appointments to my household as Queen. It has given me pleasure to pay Lorraine [always connected with her own house] a mark of attention by taking as my Chief Almoner the Abbé de Sabran, a well-conducted man and one of quality, whom they will make Bishop of Nancy. Although God saw fit to place me in the rank I occupy to-day I cannot help admiring the arrangements of Providence [*m'empêcher d'admirer l'arrangement de la Providence*] who has chosen me—me, the youngest of your daughters—for the most beautiful kingdom in Europe. I feel more than ever how much I owe to the tenderness of my august mother, who gave herself so much pain and trouble to procure me this fine establishment [*me procurer ce bel établissement*]."

The charming candour, that compliments Heaven

upon its selection of herself as Queen of France, is shown also in the simplicity with which she thanks her mother for so enviable a settlement, thinking obviously of the poor, unlucky, elder sisters of Naples and of Parma.

Then comes a postscript in the writing of Louis: "I am glad of an opportunity, my dear mother, of telling you of my affection and love. I should be glad of your advice in these moments, which are very embarrassing. I should like you to be pleased with me, and to show you how much attached I am to you; and *how much obliged I am to you for having given me your daughter, with whom I could not be better satisfied.*"

(This mental effort of Louis' was not original, for Mercy reveals to the Empress that the last sentence was the only one *not* dictated by Marie Antoinette, who insisted on his fulfilling the first duties of royalty, and who hid, from her own mother, his incapacity even for the most elementary duties). And the Queen, rather annoyed, writes again: "The King would not let my letter go without adding a little message. I feel fully that he would not have been doing too much if he had written you a special letter. I beg my dear mamma to excuse him, considering how much business he has to do; and also his timidity and natural awkwardness. You will see by the end of his compliment that, although he is very fond of me, he does not spoil me by flattery."

If her husband did not flatter her, he was the only

man at Court now who forbore to do so. Mercy writes long letters to Marie Thérèse, but they do not deal so much with facts accomplished as with previsions of what may arrive. "For from this moment the private life of the Dauphine changes in aspect. All her occupations, her actions, her ideas, ought to centre themselves in one single point—that is to say, the person of the King."

But the disposition of Louis, as King, is as yet unknown; the only certainties are those crisply struck out by Marie Antoinette in her letter to her mother. "Economy, benevolence, desire for (and need of) instruction!" These are his mental qualities and tastes. His physical peculiarities are more striking. Short, heavy, corpulent, and marvellously clumsy; he waddled, he blinked with his short-sighted eyes, he breathed obtrusively, he was never clean, in dress, hair, or person, was always neglectful of the necessities of the toilet, and always with black, begrimed hands. Dull, uncomprehending, sulky, and speechless, he was now a man of twenty; but he had neither manners nor education. He scarcely ever read (and then only the *Gazettes*), seldom spoke, and when he did speak it was in a harsh voice, that rose when excited to a shrill squeak. He was weak in body, in mind, and in digestion; but he had, at least, the desire to learn, for he loved the tracing of maps, and he took lessons in English grammar. The Prince de Ligne said of this husband of Marie Antoinette, whose three occupations were hunting, eating, and indigestion, that

she *may* have married the best man in the kingdom, "*mais certes pas le plus ragoûtant.*"

Louis, however, was attentive to his young wife, thought of ways to please her, and would have been governed by her entirely but for Mesdames; who recovered in time to meddle briskly in State matters. Mercy foresees the time when difficulties will arise: "I believe the King has some good qualities, but he has very few amiable ones. His manners are rude, and business will probably put him into his tempers. But the Queen must learn to bear these."

Of the favourite, who but so short a time before had been virtual Queen of France, no word escapes him.

Marie Thérèse is more full of remembrance. In her first letter to Mercy after the accession of her Dauphine she writes her forecast of her daughter's life, "which will be either very noble or very unhappy." Nothing can lessen the dread of the Empress for the future: "In the King, in his ministers, in all the kingdom itself, there is nothing that gives me hope. She herself is young, has never been given to reflection, and will now never learn. I think her happy days are over, and sooner even than mine were." She sends Mercy her letter to her daughter: "I would have written to the King, but I thought it would probably bore him; she can show him mine. I have written something in it about the poor du Barry; she [Marie Antoinette] wrote to me vehemently, in her letter of the 7th,

18 May, 1774.

speaking of her as 'that creature.' This unhappy woman is more to be pitied than any of us; she has lost everything in the world, and can have neither consolation nor resource in religion, which, in these trials, is the only real comfort."

And in her letter to Marie Antoinette she says drily: "I shall not pay you any compliments on your dignity; it is very dear-bought . . . you are both very young, and the burden is heavy. . . . But all that I can advise you is, do nothing precipitately; learn to see with your own eyes; change nothing. . . . Above all, listen to the advice of Mercy. He knows the Court and the people; and he is prudent." . . . Then in a postscript the Empress adds: "I hope there is no longer any question of the unhappy du Barry. . . . I hope to hear her name no more; except to learn that the King has treated her with generosity, in removing her and her husband far from the Court, and in softening her fate as much as is suitable, and humanity requires."

Marie Antoinette had said, hastily, that her husband had ordered the removal of Madame du Barry from the Duc d'Aiguillon's house of Rueil; but the suspicion of Mercy (which was mentioned in his letter of 8 May to Marie Thérèse) was right, that Louis XV. had himself given the order for Madame du Barry's departure to a nunnery, in that whispered command to the Duc d'Aiguillon. The archives preserved at the Prefecture of Police give the register of the King's Orders, entry: "9th of month of May, 1774; Sieur

Comte du Barry, taken to the Château of Vincennes. [This was an error, Comte Jean du Barry bolted ; and was never caught.] Dame Comtesse du Barry, taken to the Abbaye du Pont-aux-Dames." That the Duc d'Aiguillon regarded the fallen favourite as in some sense his prisoner is shown by his *guarding* the house at Rueil until he learned the King's pleasure, saying that she knew State secrets.

The *lettre de cachet* sent to Madame du Barry by Louis XVI. was not despatched till 16 May ; but rumour said that on the 12th, only two days after the death of the King, orders had been conveyed, by the chief exponent of such exits, de la Vrillière, to Vicomte du Barry (son of Comte Jean), the Vicomtesse, his wife, and the Marquis and Marquise du Barry, that they should not again appear at Court until the King commanded.

The sweeping out of all those who bore "*ce nom de scandale*" was briskly done. But the privilege was granted to both niece and sister-in-law of banished Madame du Barry, that they might go, if they wished, to visit that lady in her seclusion at Pont-aux-Dames, and special notification, that such family re-unions might be allowed, was sent to the Abbess of the nunnery. It is not recorded that excessive advantage was taken of this permission ; and within three months there was no longer a Marquis or a Marquise du Barry, for they had solicited, and obtained, the privilege of dropping the name altogether, and were henceforth not du Barry but d'Hargicourt.

The incarceration was not rigid, and in no way partook of hardship. Madame du Barry had her maid at the nunnery, was even allowed to have her own man-cook, maintained her business relations with her agents and the very necessary Court jeweller; and the only difficulty experienced in connection with her banishment was that of reaching Pont-aux-Dames; in the first instance. For to travel from Rueil to the south-west of Meaux, without infringement upon the borders of Paris from which she was exiled, meant a détour of fifty miles; the journey was performed in a coach with six horses.

The arrival of the famous favourite at the convent was sudden and dramatic. The humility and repentance that drove up in a coach of the regal magnificence of the Comtesse du Barry's equipage, drawn by six horses, attended by servants in the gorgeous and well-known liveries; the prayer and fasting foreshadowed by the maid and the man-cook; the self-immolation, that filled the coach with such sufficiency of diamonds that the first weeding out of jewels for immediate ready money realised 600,000 livres [£24,000]—all these substitutes for sackcloth and ashes filled the holy nuns with horror; but as they were human, with curiosity also. Tradition says that the brilliant beauty, "with her sumptuous dress, those beautiful shoulders, that incomparable throat, the complexion of roses heightened (*avivé*) with rouge, this grace of courtesies and of smiles and ease of manner," that spoke of the years in which

she had reigned, by virtue of her graces, over her subjects, the Courts of Europe, was shown into the refectory at the convent of Pont-aux-Dames, to wait while the nuns prepared her cell. And then the nuns, who might not look in the face of one so stained with sin, came in one by one to see her reflection in a looking-glass!

It is said that the lovely Madonna face and wonderful blue eyes so touched the hearts of the pious nuns that they were filled with pity and with sympathy; and they melted into kindliness, instead of horror.

The circle of Madame du Barry no longer intersects that of the life of Marie Antoinette. Once does she emerge from the shadow of dark banishment, to be found sitting under the shield of night, deeply veiled and quite silent, on the bench beside the Queen on the terrace at Versailles, when music, and the freedom given to strangers to approach and listen to it, served as medium, for the moment in which Madame du Barry touched again intimately the Court circle. Again, in 1785, her name "Jeanne Benedictine Gomard de Vaubernier" is called as a witness in the ruinous diamond necklace scandal; and once again, when the Revolutionaries threatened the life of the Queen, Madame du Barry comes forward and offers her whole possessions to Marie Antoinette: "You have so many expenses to bear, so many benefits to give. I beg you to permit me to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's!"

Marie Thérèse, the sagacious, wrote to Mercy her disapproval of the "*éclat*" with which Madame du Barry had been exiled, and the rigour with which she was treated. It is certain that there are few figures in the history of this Court that have so many winning qualities. She never took revenge, even when it lay to her hand; she never poisoned with malicious whispers; she never forgot the friends of her days of poverty, but helped them in the face of their own treachery. Her first use of wealth was to make a home for her mother; she founded two scholarships at the Paris School of Art, for workmen; she gave with the utmost generosity to the poor; no woman in her hour of need applied to her in vain; and never was the quick, impulsive temper roused to such heat as by a story of cruelty to a woman or any neglect of suffering. She was the woman of her time, no more immoral than most and less immoral than some; and the stones cast at her in her own day were those thrown by envy.

Schönbrunn, 25 May, 1774.

Marie Therese writes to Mercy of the effect that the King's death had upon her minister, Prince Kaunitz. He was so afraid of smallpox that he would not even come to discuss affairs of State with her for two days after the arrival of the messenger with the news of the fatal disease; the very name filled him with dread. Kaunitz was now about sixty-four, but his terror of smallpox was due as much to vanity as fear. His attention to his person verged on foppish-

ness; and he had all personal equipments of dress, linen, watches, jewellery, and even his furniture and carriages, from Paris. He escaped smallpox, in spite of his dread; and eventually died from a cold at the age of eighty-three, his whole long life being a protest against ventilation, for he had his living rooms always hermetically sealed against change of atmosphere. Marie Thérèse has no dread of smallpox; she has seen it too often in her own family; so she asked Mercy for fullest details—whether Louis had been really light-headed when he made that brief sixteen minutes confession of sixty-four years of sin; whether in the King's privy purse had really been found forty millions of florins, or was it only of livres; whether Mercy can find out how much truth there is in de Rohan's story that the death of the Dauphin (father of Louis XVI.) was due to poison administered by the Duc de Choiseul; and if he can obtain for her "a portrait of my daughter in deep mourning as she is now wearing, and they say she is even without powder. Even if the portrait does not resemble her, I should like to see the dress. . . . They say here that the King dispensed with all ceremonies, and had his grandfather buried without any formalities at all."

The Empress also writes to Marie Antoinette, who has been far too busy to send a letter to her mother. She does not reproach her with the neglect, but says of her own aged writing: "It is not of the best, my hands and my eyes are failing; I shall no longer be able to write to you but by

Schönbrunn, 30 May, 1774.

the hand of another. You will excuse the blots and erasures in this. I have taken it up three times, and the wind has twice blown it on to the ground. You know the draughts that rage in my rooms." She is horrified to hear that Mesdames had insisted upon going to Choisy, even though in a separate suite of apartments; as if they sicken of smallpox and endanger the King and Queen! "Then I implore you to leave within twenty-four hours. . . . the others may follow, *but, above all, no aunts!*"

When the obstinate aunts had duly brought the infection to Choisy as was anticipated, and had all three sickened of smallpox, the Court went away hurriedly; and the Royal family went to La Muette in the Bois de Boulogne, in the district of Passy. This château had seen many changes. Originally a little hunting lodge, as its name implies, it became a favourite country residence of the Regent d'Orléans, in the early part of the reign of Louis XV. Then it belonged to his daughter, the Duchesse de Berry, (she married the youngest grandson of Louis XIV.) whose life was shortened by her excesses and its epitaph was "*courte et bonne.*" The orgies of the Duchesse de Berry in La Muette were followed (after her early death at the age of twenty-four) by the natural evolution of La Muette into the Parc-aux-cerfs of Louis XV., the sporting nomenclature was still retained. It has now become the home of Louis XVI. and of Marie Antoinette—a King, desiring good to his uttermost, but bungling: a Queen, "young,

amiable, enterprising, inconstant, wishing to govern with too much strenuousness, and fickle, that greatest enemy of high enterprise." And from 6 o'clock in the morning until sunset the cheers of "Long live the King" never cease outside the gates.

Paris, 7 June, 1774.

Mercy's daily reports differ now from those sent in the years when he wrote of a Dauphine. Events crowd, although the Court is in deep mourning; for upon Louis hangs everything, and "he goes every hour to see the Queen." He has commanded the Royal family to drop the title of "your Majesty" in addressing him, of itself proof of wonderful simplicity. The Prince de Conti thought the opportunity favourable for returning to Court after his disgrace. Louis replied that as the Prince had neglected to take the chance of reconciliation before, he considered it would be disrespectful to the memory of his grandfather to receive him.

The Queen has visited the convent of the Carmelites to see the aunt Madame Louise, who is now very fat, but has got over the terror of the convent stairs, down which she had at first to proceed in sitting posture. The Queen sees the Princesse de Lamballe very often, "an excellent choice, for this Princesse has a sweet nature, and pleasant, sincere character, untainted by intrigue and similar evils."

(Madame de Genlis says of her that she was delicately pretty, with irregular features; that she had awful hands; that she was gay, obliging and good-natured, hiding absolute nullity of wits under



LOUIS XVI.

(From the portrait given by the King to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau.

[*Page* 369.

an infantine air ; and that she never had an opinion of her own, but always adopted one ready-made from the person of the best reputation for wit on that subject. She was that rarity—a Piedmontese without intrigue. She never did one act in her life that could excite the wrath of the people ; she travelled from Savoy in the first horrors of the Revolution to be with the Royal family in their captivity ; and the Revolutionaries killed her in her prison cell, for her crime of friendship. In all the madnesses of the Revolution there is none more horrible than the picture that always rises in the mind at mention of the name of the Princesse de Lamballe. The murder in the cell, the hacking off the innocent head, and the summoning of the *perruquier* from the Rue St. Antoine to curl and powder its beautiful fair hair ; and then the march through the streets with the head, dressed in Court travesty, stuck upon a pike; and the thrusting of the dead face of her friend under the window of Marie Antoinette in the Tour du Temple.)

Mercy mentions in his letter of 7 June the gift of the *Petit Trianon*. Marie Antoinette had long wanted to have a little house of her own, "to do just what I like in it;" and from 18 May the young King and Queen had commenced the most simple and countrified of lives. They walked arm-in-arm upon the terraces at Versailles ; they almost set the example of observance of their marriage vows to the Court ; they sat upon the grass and ate strawberries and cream, discussing the while many plans for the better

government of France and the construction of a model dairy in the gardens laid out by Louis XV. for other joys. The first idea of Louis, the dull but kind-hearted, was to give these simple pleasures to Marie Antoinette and to his old aunts. Mesdames received the Château de Bellevue where they could grow their flowers and gather their little Court; and Marie Antoinette had her desired *Petit Trianon*, and immediately took possession of it to give a little dinner to the King and the Royal family.

To a corrupt Court, however, there was so little pleasure in building thatched cottages and installing twelve poor families to be visited and protected, that philanthropy was regarded as intrigue, and a little dairy as a cloak for vice.

Another novelty is mentioned by Mercy. The etiquette of the Court had always regarded as the height of impropriety any suggestion that a King and Queen should eat their suppers together. Hence the irregularities of Louis XV.'s hunting suppers; for as his wife was the sole person with whom it would be improper to sup, other improprieties could not exist. At Mercy's suggestion, all danger of the St. Hubert suppers and similar royal precedents were removed from Louis XVI., by Marie Antoinette announcing that this rule of etiquette was abolished; and that henceforward husband and wife would sup together.

Mercy touches upon the suspicion of the death of the Dauphin, rumoured by de Rohan to be

due to poison. It has been noticed that the deaths of eminent personages (unless from causes that admit of no question, even from the most ignorant) have always been attributed to poison; as if eminence in itself were a sort of inoculation against the ordinary diseases of the flesh. When, in the fatal year of 1712, the deaths occurred in rapid succession of the Dauphin of France, his son the Duc de Bourgogne and the Duchesse de Bourgogne, and their son the Duc de Bretagne, it was popularly supposed to be poison, that swept off three generations of heirs to the French throne, as if smallpox, their ailment, were insufficient cause. "Smallpox," says Mercy, "as every one knows, was the real cause of the Dauphin's death; for although he recovered apparently from the attack, he never had again a moment's health, and died from lung disease, as did also the Dauphine. . . . But what is so deplorable in this accusation brought by the Comtesse de Marsan and the Prince de Rohan against the Duc de Choiseul is that the origin of their hate lies in motives to which I cannot even refer to your Majesty, as they turn upon "*des objets de galanterie.*"

This suspicion against de Choiseul, obviously absurd, openly ridiculed, and whose origin was equally matter of common knowledge, was yet so rooted in Louis XVI.'s unreasoning mind that it was the obstacle to de Choiseul's return to the Ministry.

The great news at Court was that the King had decided to be inoculated for smallpox. This decision

caused great results; for not only was his Majesty's example followed immediately by "Monsieur" and by the Comte d'Artois, but it gave rise to a new head-dress, a matter of equal importance. *Coiffure à l'inoculation* had instant vogue. It included a serpent representing medicine, a club to indicate the blow it dealt disease, the rising sun, that stood for Louis, and an olive tree full of fruit, plainly telling the anticipated happy results. The "*Pouffs de circonstance*" were considered very delicate tributes of sentiment; and one lady went to Court bearing on the two sides of her head discreet references to both the dead and the living Louis. Over the left ear was a cypress and black crêpe "*soucis*" (not nearly as full of *esprit* when called marigolds); over the right was a great sheaf of wheat and a horn of plenty, from which streamed figs, grapes, melons, and other fruits. The Duchesse de Lauzun was less topical but more ornate; and her head carried an entire landscape in relief, also a stormy sea, with ducks on its borders, a sportsman taking aim, a mill on the crown of her head, with the milleress being courted by an Abbé, and the miller driving a donkey down by the ear. And the condition of these heads, plastered in grease and powder, after a week or two, is indicated by the foresight of the "*par à graissé*" which had to be fixed to the backs of all furniture; and by the precaution taken by the more fastidious of sitting only upon a stool for the greater security.

Paris, 15 June, 1774.

Events follow rapidly. D'Aiguillon is dismissed,

quietly and without a *lettre de cachet* ; and disappears away into Gascony ; de la Vrillière "the man with three titles, and without a good name," goes also. He was bred a lawyer, and never served in the army, hence his omission from the knighthood of the Order of the St.-Esprit, of which he was but an officer. Hence also the subtle difference in his rank, for he was not a peer, although created a Duke. And now the traffic in *lettres de cachet* ceases ; and Madame de Langeac no longer sells them publicly, when "any man of fashion might have a parcel of blank ones," for a consideration. Louis XVI. renounces his right to the accession tax, and Marie Antoinette renounces hers to the "*Ceinture de la Reine*," raised by a tax on coals and wine in Paris.

She writes to her mother that the inoculation of the King and his brothers has been favourable. "The King had very high fever for three days . . . but not very many pustules ; those on his nose, however, were very remarkable. The King has been out walking every day and his brothers also." **Marly, 27 June, 1774.**

Mercy adds his testimony as to the satisfactory way in which the King has developed smallpox ; and mentions casually : "The eruption of the smallpox has not in any way changed the King's ordinary habits of life. On Sunday he went to hear Mass and walked in the gardens. Throughout this stay at Marly they spend the days in walking, in playing billiards and cards in the evening. The family **28 June, 1774.**

is all together, and the Court is very numerous. All is carried on with so much gaiety that one forgets all idea of smallpox and illness. . . . Mesdames have returned; they are badly marked by the smallpox, and are still very red."

That any one in the whole of France could escape smallpox seems incredible when even at Court, after the awful horrors of Louis' death only in the previous month, Louis and his brothers, with smallpox full upon them, associate without the slightest restraint with every one at Court; and even play cards and billiards publicly.

CHAPTER II

The Secret Papers of Louis XV.—His Private Hoard—His Will—His Legacies—The Royal *Tartuffe*—New Ministers of State—Louis XVI. in Touch with his People—The Little Petition-box on the Gates—"Here lies Louis by the Grace of God"—Grasping Royalties—The Revenues of the Queens of France—Open Contempt shown to Louis—Dearth of Corn in France—The "*Pacte de Famine*"—Fall of Terray and Maupeou—Libel against Marie Antoinette

THE investigation of Louis XV.'s papers offered many points of interest; and the breaking of the official seals had been eagerly awaited by all purveyors of gossip in Europe. Marie Thérèse had contented herself with inquiry as to the amount of cash discovered, and the terms of the late King's will, which had been discussed long before they became known. The seals were broken at Versailles on 8 June; and the King himself went to examine the proofs of his grandfather's moral economy. A great disappointment was the small amount of money discovered. Louis XV. had been supposed to keep an immense sum of money in his apartments at Versailles, ready for any emergency. His great pleasure had been, as he said himself, to separate Louis de Bourbon from the King of France; and he had personally

transacted all matters relative to sales of houses and lands in cases when he wished to touch the proceeds personally and not pass them in to any account. In this private room at Versailles the business of such sales was carried on, the purchasers brought the value in gold, the contracts were signed by "Louis de Bourbon;" and no record was kept or furnished for accountants to observe with scandalised eyes. It was anticipated that at least 22,000,000 livres would be discovered [£880,000]; but these treasures diminished sadly upon touching, for only a sum of 50,000 francs [£2,000] was found.

The will of the King was copied by his grandson alone, so that Mercy could not send the full details to Marie Thérèse, but only its main provisos. It had been drawn up in 1767, and commenced with confession: "I have governed ill, owing to my own lack of talent and want of proper support." He desired a simple funeral, but his wildest imaginings could not have conceived the simplicity of that which his body had received before the will had been opened. There were no pious legacies—except that of a portion of his anatomy to the Cathedral of Nôtre Dame, which could not have been carried out even if it had been known in time. There were no legacies to the nobles who had served him; showing that the King appreciated these services at their proper value. To his grandsons he left all his personal jewels; to Mesdames each a life annuity of 2000 livres [£80], with which they were justly dissatisfied, particularly Madame

Adélaïde, who was generously, rather extravagantly, minded; and had just distributed 80,000 livres [£3,200] in presents to those who had cared for and nursed her in her own illness—and had charged the amount to the King.

To each of his illegitimate children was left a legacy, the memoirs say, of 500,000 livres [£20,000]; and as their number was over sixty, this item was an important one in the will.

Among the papers were many of the peculiar interest expected; and all those that related to the secret hoard and expenditure were put together by Louis XVI. and given to his *valet de chambre*, Thierry. But an unexpected find was the discovery of many letters from the Comte and Comtesse de Provence; who, playing their sly, hypocritical game against the Dauphin, had not calculated upon their falseness being proved in their own writing. Mercy details the shock it had been to the feeble, affectionate Louis to read these letters; and how it stirred him to say, when "*Tartuffe*" was the subject of the royal amateur theatricals: "Quite a natural rôle!" 28 June, 1774.

D'Aiguillon had fallen, (the fall broken by a "gratification" of 500,000 livres [£20,000]); and the Comte de Vergennes ruled in his stead, an able man, whose policy directly fostered the seeds of the Revolution. He helped the revolt of the American colonies from Great Britain: and showed the way to France to fling off authority. De Boynes, tired of studying the navy as shown on the Opera stage,

resigned; and Turgot was appointed head of the Admiralty, without having given the subject even this amount of special study. Abbé Terray and Chancellor Maupeou still held tightly to their offices; and were not dislodged for another two months. Then Louis XVI. conceived the sublime idea of governing France by aid of a box fixed on the gate at Choisy, which the poor dull King thought would be a vehicle of communication between Sovereign and people. So it was; and it served to convey such daily indecencies of libels to Louis that it was soon removed; the representation of the minds of his people did not prove useful to government.

The turbulent Duc d'Orléans, and his son de Chartres were once more in disgrace and forbidden to appear at Court; their fresh offence was the refusal to attend a service given in memory of the late King. This act had the effect intended, of increasing their popularity with the people, who had now crystallised their hatred of the *Bien-aimé* and their relief at his death in the epitaph:

"*Ci-gît Louis par la Grâce de Dieu.*"

Paris, 31 July, 1774.

Mercy writes that instant plans of enriching themselves were formed by all the Royal family, in the favourable circumstances of Louis' weak nature. The Comtes and Comtesses de Provence and d'Artois were the first to obtain from the King that all pensions charged upon their estates were henceforward to be paid out of the Royal treasury. Mesdames, whose income, apart from the very in-

considerable legacy before mentioned, was 200,000 livres [£8,000], also were freed from pension charges; and Marie Antoinette announced her intention of claiming the same exemption. But the shrewd Mercy pointed out this would be injudicious; in the first place, the Queen could never follow an example set by Mesdames; in the second, nothing could be more correct than that the pensioners should still look to her as the source of bounty. But he suggested that if she merely demanded an *increase* of her revenues, to the amount of the 30,000 livres [£1,200] now paid in pensions it would look much better and come to the same thing.

Mercy writes: "For more than two hundred years the sum allotted to the household of a Queen of France has been fixed by the Chamber at 600,000 livres tournois [£24,000]. But in consequence of the depreciation of the value of money and also of the increase of luxury, for many years past this sum has been found to be insufficient. However, the former condition has still obtained, and the deficit been supplied by sums given under the head of 'Extraordinary Expenses'; which sums amount at the present time to nearly 2,000,000 of livres [£80,000]. I have proposed to the Queen to induce the King to fix the aforesaid amount as that necessary for the maintenance of the Queen's household; and to abolish altogether the item of 'Extraordinary Expenses.' This change, while costing the Royal treasury no more, will be of great use to the Queen; because, by reason of the immense

abuses that exist here, all the sums employed under the term "extraordinary" are regulated by the Comptroller of the Household and by his subordinates, and are subject to the deductions that each makes. . . . An economy of over 600,000 livres [£24,000] will thus be made, whereby, without any change or reform in the service, she will save at least 100,000 écus."

The charges brought against Marie Antoinette in after years of wild extravagance were disproved before even so biassed a tribunal as the Commune, which discovered that her dress expenses were actually less than, instead of far exceeding, those of the Queen of Spain. It may be of interest to note here that the Empress Josephine received 3,000,000 francs as annual income.

The loss of Louis XV.'s grip upon the etiquette of Court is shown by numberless little affronts offered to the flabby King who now represents the autocratic power. The first instance of insubordination comes from the brothers and their wives, who refuse to pay to Louis the daily visit of ceremony exacted by their grandfather. Mesdames, having arranged this defiance, follow the lead. De Provence holds himself slighted because he is not appointed a Councillor of State—at nineteen years old. D'Artois shows his contempt for the King so openly that it is the scandal of strangers who cannot tell by any signs of respect which of the three brothers is the King. He walks in front of his Majesty, passes before him twenty times

when he is holding a reception, pushes him, treads on his feet, pays him no attention at all, and acts in a manner "truly shocking." While the wives of both Princes are embittered into open spite by a careless comparison of Marie Antoinette's between her own Imperial and ancient House of Hapsburg, and Savoy, the purveyor of domestic happiness to so many scions of the Royal family of France since the days of Louis XIV., that one looks upon the little principality as a matrimonial preserve.

Mercy says that the King is showing much weakness and indecision in his dealings with his brothers; for in this the influence of the Queen cannot, for obvious reasons, be exercised, and without it his will is as water, he cannot even feel resentment sufficiently keenly to reprove or restrain the insulting manner of his brother. 15 August, 1774.

But to Paris all this is as nothing compared with the price of corn. With the death of Louis, whose private funds were fattened by the sale of its monopoly; with the departure of Madame du Barry, into whose pretty hands so much commission money slipped; with the accession of Marie Antoinette, who had twice before lowered the price of bread, the people looked for marvels of reduction. The monopoly, first granted in the reign of Louis XV., was twofold in its effect; for as corn was prohibited as an article of international trade, it remained in France at the mercy of a gang of financiers, who raised its price at their convenience. In the last four years of the reign

of Louis XV. there was universal slow starvation, real dearth of bread even of such as Bordeaux compounded with aid of dust, and factitious scarcity of corn; and the millions watched hungrily for the day of the breaking of the iniquitous "*Pacte de famine.*" With an empty Treasury and a yawning deficit there was every chance that so ready a means of squeezing revenue would have been adopted, regardless of tumult and the rising of starved hordes. The monopolist company made its offer to Louis XVI.; and was on the point of having it accepted, when it occurred to Louis to ask the Queen's views. Marie Antoinette's quick convincing replies made the scheme of renewal vanish, and Mercy says he took good care that the people should learn to whom they owed the relief.

This "*Pacte de famine*" it was that destroyed the Abbé Terray, whose ingenious work it had been, amongst other jugglings with national funds. To Terray's unscrupulous brain had occurred the scheme by which Louis XV. raised the money to pay his troops, by suspending payment of the *Billets de Rescription.* Terray's was the expedient of paying only eightpence in the shilling, which reduced indebtedness to two-thirds, and gave point to the jest in the pressure of a theatre crush: "Oh, that Abbé Terray were here to reduce us to two-thirds!" His also the plan of transforming annuities into a tontine; his again the appropriation of the sinking-fund. When the swindled stormed, he tolerantly observed, that it was only to be expected that those flayed should scream.

But the only proceedings of Paris were, as usual, mere words; and it was recognised that the Abbé had brains, even if they were unscrupulous. De Choiseul remarked, on his dismissal, that it would have been wiser to have retained him in the Ministry; it would have been easy to keep him in the straight path: it needed but a Cardinal's hat on one side of his desk, and a gallows on the other.

The news of his fall was received by the populace with such wild enthusiasm, such firing of guns and bonfires and illuminations, that the *Gardes françaises* had to rest on their arms for seven days and seven nights. His effigy, in a cassock, was hanged, and that of Chancellor Maupeou, in judge's robe, was burnt; and the riots of triumph were with difficulty suppressed. Terray was regarded as the incarnation of evil; and when he, being ill, summoned the doctor Bonvard to relieve his pain, saying he was suffering "*comme un damné*," the doctor's reply, "*Quoi? déjà, monseigneur?*" expressed the feeling of the multitude.

A curious light upon the methods of the time is shown in an indignant letter from Marie Thérèse, into whose hands had fallen one of the usual gross and scurrilous libels that constituted the mass of the national reading. This libel was directed against Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette; and the wounded Empress writes: "I would never have believed that such inveterate hate could be held in the hearts of the French against Austria, against my person, and against the poor innocent Queen. This

28 August. 1774.

it is that is the result of such lavish adulation! This is the love they bear to my daughter! Never have I seen anything so atrocious; and it fills my heart with the bitterest contempt for this nation without religion, without manners, and without feeling!"

The story of this particular lampoon's production was one commencing before the death of Louis XV. A book had been published in London against Madame du Barry, which it was impossible even for her, accustomed and tolerant as she was, to permit to circulate in France. Louis XV. accordingly despatched a messenger named Beaumarchais to suppress this libel, by buying up the whole London edition. He was quite successful, but on his return to Paris found Louis XV. dead, and his successor not anxious to be liberal in payment of expensive bills for the maintenance of Madame du Barry's reputation. The natural desire was then to find a libel for whose suppression Louis *would* pay, and supply in such cases is always equal to the demand. So outrageous a libel on Marie Antoinette was produced as lever of the purse strings that Beaumarchais again departed on this profitable commerce: and had a surprising series of (self-related) adventures, that resulted in the destruction of one edition in London, and of another in Amsterdam; and then, with mis-guided zeal, he went to Vienna, thinking to reap a double harvest.

But here he found common sense, which speedily flung the blackmailer into prison, Kaunitz being

convinced the whole business was organised,—first written, then suppressed,—by Beaumarchais himself.

Mercy's reply is little hopeful for the future. He says the origin of "these atrocities that infect this country" is to be traced in the disgraceful scenes of the last years of Louis XV.; but he says the taste for these foul libels has taken such firm hold upon the people that their daily pleasure is in anonymous calumnies, in the blackest and most incredible aspersions, which "they hurl one day and quite forget the next." But neither he nor Marie Thérèse believe the tool Beaumarchais to have been the author of this disgusting pamphlet. Mercy's suspicions turn to the disgraced Duc d'Aiguillon, disgraced by influence of the Queen; those of the Empress to the equally disgraced and venomous de Rohan, who is now in Paris, his scandalous insolence having reaped its reward of dismissal. Mercy had written that "Rohan's word here is of no weight; the King has the poorest opinion of him; the Queen treats him with the utmost coldness; he is pursued by his creditors; the clergy are trying to force him to give up a concession granted him by the late King, empowering him to raise money on his benefices. . . . He has been trying for eight days to obtain an audience from the King. . . . I can see that nothing will ever cause the Queen to look upon him with any favour."

Paris, 11 September, 1774.

This libel was brought to the notice of Marie Antoinette by the King; who appeared not to have

read it but merely to have received some news respecting this the first of the many foul writings published against Marie Antoinette. The Queen sent for Mercy that she might learn from him all about this secret he had so carefully guarded; and he then mentioned the least offensive points it contained, and told her that for the French it was not sufficient that she was of irreproachable conduct, it was not enough to avoid evil, she must be noticed actively doing them good. "Never has the Queen listened to me so earnestly. She returned again to the libel and showed dread lest a single copy might have escaped and thus a new edition be rendered possible. I told her that even if it were, such defamation could only recoil on the contemptible author." The affair ended with the release of Beaumarchais, and a payment to him of some money, in recognition that he was either a tool or a fool.

28 September, 1774.

The matter of the Queen's revenues had remained in abeyance in consequence of Marie Antoinette's dislike to ask favours for herself although she was not averse to demand them for others, and Mercy therefore placed the matter before the Comptroller-General Turgot, that it might appear to have been arranged by thought of the King. These pious frauds, whose aim was to credit Louis XVI. with some unearned tribute, are carried on by all who seek to win for Marie Antoinette the happiness of respecting her husband. In this plan of the revenues, there was but one difficulty, Turgot

20 October, 1774.

was willing and eager, but Marie Antoinette herself had unwittingly raised an obstacle. The King, in pursuance of the first of his three qualifications for sovereignty, was bent on economy. A custom, that had grown under Louis XV. to a colossal abuse, was that of giving a dowry to any one about to marry who could show a claim of regard by one of the Royal household. This custom Louis XVI. had abolished at once; but Marie Antoinette, in answer to a petition from the Princesse de Lamballe, had charged herself with the dowry of a Demoiselle de Guébriant, the daughter of the *dame de compagnie* of the Princesse.

Turgot, willing but embarrassed, saw no way out; he must either offend the Queen or break the new command of the King. But Mercy neatly settled the difficulty by pointing out it would be easy to make retro-active this settlement upon the Queen, so that the accession of revenue would date from the month of July, thus adding to the Queen's list the very sum of 50,000 francs [£2,000] required for the Demoiselle de Guébriant.

That the plan was entirely successful is shown in Marie Antoinette's astonished pride in her letter to her mother. "The King has just done such a charming thing for me. I had for my privy purse only 96,000 livres [£3,840,] the same amount as the late Queen, whose debts they were obliged to pay three times: I have never made any debts, but I should have been obliged to be stingy to

16 November, 1774.

avoid them. The King, without my knowing anything about it, has increased my revenues to more than double. I shall have 200,000 livres a year, that is 80,000 florins [£8,000]." She is further rejoicing that she had induced the King to promise that once a week they shall sup together, in company with some chosen ladies and gentlemen of the Court. "I think it the best way to avoid his being dragged into bad company as his grandfather was. And, besides, it prevents his being too familiar with his valets. . . . The painters worry me to death. I have kept this messenger back that my portrait may be finished. They have just brought it to me; it is so unlike that I cannot send it. I hope to have a good one by next month."

She ends with the request that her mother will send the sizes of her third and little fingers, that she may have some rings made, "so charming, in the shape of garters."

Mercy's plan in connection with the Royal suppers was carried out as he had wished. "The King has decided to abolish the rule of etiquette that has hitherto prevented the gentlemen of the Court from having the privilege of supper with the Princesses of the Royal family; and the first supper was held on Saturday, 22 October. . . . Afterwards the Queen has play in her apartments, and these, although vast, are always full. For very many years there have not been so many people at Court as now, nor those of such quality. . . .

Paris, 17 November, 1774.

The result is that the courts of Madame of the Comtesse d'Artois and of Mesdames are almost deserted."

The Court mourning prevents any balls or theatres, so the time passes monotonously. The Queen drives twice a week; she walks or rides on the other days, "but her only other occupation is music. Her Majesty has a lesson on the harp for an hour and a half each morning, and nearly every afternoon there is a little concert that repeats the lesson of the morning. The Queen makes great progress; but she also wastes much valuable time." Mercy pointed out that music required the devotion of a lifetime, that no one could excel in it who did not adopt it as a profession; and that all persons of high rank can only end by regretting the time they waste in learning an art in which it is impossible for them to excel; while it does not admit of mediocrity. But Marie Antoinette continued her practising, for music was the one great taste of her life. She knew nothing of pictures; she had an unfortunate knack of selecting the very worst painters for her commissions; and she confessed that in her opinion the sole merit of a portrait lay in its likeness to the sitter. This lack of taste led her into many errors, and accounts for the rarity of any artistic portrait of Marie Antoinette; for she permitted herself to be painted by any unknown and incompetent man who obtained an introduction, and she honoured the most inefficient with commissions to paint her for the Royal

galleries. But music was to her a delight; and she took pleasure in fostering it, in raising the standard in France, in helping musicians, and in giving the whole weight of her Royal patronage to encourage the introduction of German music. She was the chief patron of Gluck, who came to Paris upon her invitation, of Piccini, of Sacchini, and of many other musicians of the time; but Gluck was specially favoured, and he owed his reputation to her patronage. In 1774 his *Iphigènie* was produced before Marie Antoinette and all the Royal family and the Court; and the whole audience rose and bowed at the chorus, "*Chantons, célébrons notre Reine*," cheering tumultuously for the space of fifteen minutes. In 1793 the same *Iphigènie en Aulide* was given to the same frantic applause; while the Queen lay in her cell, awaiting death.

Mercy has more praise for her memory than for her music. He writes to the Empress that her quickness of intelligence and clearness of recollection are wonderful. "The advantage of talking to the Queen, upon no matter what subject, is that by a most fortunate gift of memory she forgets nothing that she has ever heard, even if it be in connection with things that did not interest her, and to which therefore she paid, at the time, only half attention; but these points remain with her, and when occasion arises she recalls the whole of my remarks on any subject."

In his secret despatch of the same date Mercy

gives an account of the difficulty about the Royal suppers, which, as it showed the King not only weak but untruthful and shifty, could not be written in the open letter. The difficulty was of course raised by Mesdames, to whom etiquette was a religion ; and any breach of it, even to obtain what was admitted by every one to be of the highest moral influence upon the King, savoured therefore of impiety. It would have seemed improbable that the elderly spinsters, who had effectually intervened to screen the innocence of the Dauphin from the hunting suppers with Madame du Barry, should cast all their weight *against* a change that removed any danger of similar improprieties from Louis XVI. by permitting him to have supper with his own wife. But the love of meddling was stronger than morality ; and when Marie Antoinette made her proposal to Louis, she was met by hesitation, embarrassment, and a final plea from her husband that he must first consult his aunt Victoire.

As Mercy pointed out, the matter was one of rival powers ; and as the public knew, and approved the proposed arrangement greatly, if the Queen let the aunts win she lost her own prestige ; and he showed Marie Antoinette that the King had not been straightforward in the matter, for it was Madame Adélaïde, not Victoire, with whom he was intriguing. Within twenty-four hours Marie Antoinette, now roused, had her own way ; a vigorous explanation to the weak King resulted in his yielding at once ; and before she left him it was resolved that the arrangement should

be made. The date was fixed instantly and then published; and the supper had to be given on a *jour maigre*, by force of circumstances, for the following day was Sunday, and Mesdames were to arrive on Monday. So Saturday saw the first supper and its success. When Madame Adélaïde heard of it, she immediately developed "an inflammation;" but, as Mercy says, she got well when it was least expected, and all three Mesdames were present at the third supper.

The year 1774 thus ended in perfect quiet and peace, with no greater danger than a sleigh accident in December. Snow was upon the ground in Paris, all riding and driving was stopped—only sleigh driving could be enjoyed; and Marie Antoinette loved this sport, which was Austrian and reminded her of her home. The driver of the Queen's sleigh does not seem to have been much of a whip, for when the fluttering of the flag on the front of the sleigh startled the horse, he dropped the reins and fell off the sleigh. But the Queen had the presence of mind to seize the reins and turn the horse into a hedge; thus preventing what might have been a serious accident. Mercy adds: "I notice that the Queen has been rather disgusted with this sport, considering how easily accidents may happen here, as they know so little how to drive."

CHAPTER III

The Court Balls—Their Results—Emperor Joseph II. and Marie Antoinette—Visit of the Archduke Maximilian—His Blunders—Pride of the Princes—The *Fêtes* at Court—Mercy's Supper and its Sequel—The Emperor Joseph and de Rohan—No Portraits of Louis XVI.—Marie Antoinette and her Dress—The Coiffures of the Time—"*Bonnet à la Bonne Maman*"—The Introduction of Horse-racing—The Comte de Guines—Promotion of "The Seven Deadly Sins"—The Paris Corn Riot—De Maurepas—The Coronation—"*Elle me gêne*"—The tears of Marie Antoinette—Louis heals the sick

THE New Year opens with pleasures. Two hundred ladies come to pay their Court on 1 January; balls are given every Monday, masked quadrilles in Norwegian and Lapland dress and country dances whereat appear "Milady Elsbury" (otherwise Lady Ailesbury, Horace Walpole's relative), and other English ladies; fancy dress balls, where all the cavaliers wear costumes of the *partie de chasse* of Henri IV. and the ladies those of the time of Marie de Médicis, Marie Antoinette appearing as Gabrielle d'Estrées, which is found so becoming that the Court actually contemplates adopting this dress for daily use. Serious

trouble results, not from the costume but from an incident which Mercy thinks worth while to relate, lest the Empress hear of it from the highly-seasoned *Gazettes*. There was a certain young seigneur who appears under various names, as "M. d'Houblot," or as "le Marquis de Douvetot," as Mercy disguises him; but who was really the Vicomte d'Houdetot, son of that Comtesse d'Houdetot whom Jean Jacques Rousseau describes as riding on horseback, wearing man's clothes, "not handsome, marked with smallpox, complexion coarse, short-sighted, with round eyes"; of whom he (with some lack of taste considering this description) was much enamoured. M. d'Houdetot was at the ball of Marie Antoinette and picked up a love-letter that he found upon the floor of the ball-room. He not only read it, but showed it to every one; "and there ensued suspicions as to various ladies, and many remarks."

19 January. 1775.

The Queen was informed by the indignant ladies of the Court, who all made common cause; because, as was said, "one had written, but all were capable of writing, this letter;" and her Majesty promptly struck the name of the Marquis d'Houdetot off the list of the Court.

The prospect of the visit of her brother Maximilian, filled the Queen with pleasure; for she always retained the warmest affection for her family—an affection often wounded, especially by the Emperor Joseph. The Emperor had written a letter to Marie

Antoinette, cavilling at her handwriting, blaming her for forgetting her German, and so abusing his brotherly privilege that Marie Thérèse had endeavoured to prevent its despatch by telling her son that he had no right so to correct a Queen of France; and that he ran great risk of breaking off all correspondence. There can be no better reply to the unfounded accusations brought by the French, of Marie Antoinette's too-Austrian tendencies, than the fact, to which this letter of her brother bears witness, that she has by now forgotten her German in her own translation into a Frenchwoman. Joseph II. had enjoined upon Maximilian, whose visit to Marie Antoinette now approaches, that he was to *watch* his sister well, and to speak nothing but German—a graceful courtesy towards a King and Queen of France. Now he writes a letter, all in German, to Marie Antoinette, which she has to bring to Mercy to translate, as it is nearly five years since she has spoken that language; and she has passed from childhood to womanhood in fitting herself for her adopted nationality. Mercy was much exercised over this letter, "wittily-turned but caustic and severe;" and tried to soften it in translating, "sweetening things as far as was possible between the two languages." He saw its effect upon the Queen. She thought for a moment, and then said: "There is enough ground here to quarrel, but I will never quarrel with my brother; I shall write him a jesting reply." Mercy hopes that Maximilian *will* "watch her well," for nothing could be better

for the Queen's advantage from every point; and as for flattery, Marie Antoinette has always disliked it, both from her natural character and from her intelligence, which appraised its value: and "I doubt if there is any living person of her rank besides herself to whom one can always speak the truth without fear."

This much anticipated visit of the Archduke Maximilian was not a success. A year younger than Marie Antoinette, he was more unformed and ill-mannered than was considered pardonable at Versailles, where the Comte d'Artois was by way of being a polished—if rather drunken—gentleman, although he was, again, a year younger than Maximilian. There was nothing omitted from this visit that could fail to annoy the French: and from the arrival of the Archduke, under the *incognito* of "Comte de Burgau," until his departure, leaving a legacy of bitterness that rankled long in a grudge against Marie Antoinette, the record of his stay in France was one of continued mishaps.

Mercy had a very disturbed time. He writes that he had felt it his duty, "in my zeal never to quit this august Prince; and to be always ready to suggest at any moment what I believed would be useful to him." But even this care, though it nearly exhausted Mercy, did not save Maximilian from committing blunders everywhere. On hearing by his despatches that the Archduke would arrive immediately, Mercy waited upon the Queen to learn her will. The balls had been

Paris, 20 February, 1775.

so continuous and so late (they are mentioned as *bals de nuit* instead of ending at ten o'clock at night), that Mercy was not surprised to find she was still in bed, though it was then past eleven, and nearly midday. "Although she had not risen, she commanded that I should enter, doubtless because the King expressed the wish, as I found the monarch, *en déshabillé*, sitting by the head of the Queen's bed. I expressed to their Majesties everything that had reference to the approaching visit of the Archduke. The King asked me about the Prince . . . saying, 'We must take care to amuse him.' The Queen replied that she would answer for that; and the conversation, which lasted for more than a quarter of an hour, only turned on similar subjects. On this occasion, as on many others, I have been in a position to see the simplicity and intimacy that exist between the King and Queen in their familiar relations. On this point nothing is left to be desired."

The first false step made by Maximilian was his arrival, in strictest *incognito*, yet with pretension to be treated, not as the Comte de Burgau, but as an Archduke. The wise old Empress, on hearing of her son's refusal to pay the first visit, expressed her disapproval: "he was in strict *incognito*, he should have accepted all and demanded nothing." But upon this point of etiquette the whole Court split; for if he were the Comte de Burgau it was his duty to pay the first call upon the Princes of the Blood, the Duc d'Orléans, Prince de Conti and Prince de Condé;

if he were the Archduke Maximilian it was their duty to call upon him. As this vital point remained unsettled, no one called; and the bitter disappointment and anger of Marie Antoinette flamed out against the arrogant Princes who refused to pay to her brother the honour due to his rank. This was the first real break with the Duc d'Orléans, to whom Marie Antoinette spoke with vehement clearness: "The King and his brothers have treated him as a brother. Apart from his dignity of Archduke you may have noticed that the King admitted him, as brother, into the intimacy of the Royal family, an honour to which, I imagine, you have never aspired. But though my brother will be sorry not to have seen the Princes, he is but a short time in Paris, and has many other sights to see; he will make shift to do without that."

The populace of Paris—who applauded the Duc d'Orléans as the enemy of Royalty, until, with equal truth, they guillotined him as its friend—saw in this discourtesy and self-assertion merely the just maintenance of those rights of descent from Henri IV.—for which they later guillotined Louis XVI.; and cheered the Duc de Chartres whenever he ostentatiously showed himself in public places in Paris, at an hour when all the Court was engaged in some festivity of welcome to the brother of the Queen.

Maximilian was, himself, his own chief enemy. In the writings of the time we read: "His figure is vulgar, he shows no wit, he seems to have no taste, and the dancing lessons he received from a French

dancing-master were pure waste." The figure of the boy of nineteen was already showing signs of the immense corpulence that obliged him at the age of thirty-two to have a carriage specially constructed to convey his thirty-two stone of bulk, with an extra sized doorway through which he could pass without inconvenience. His bad manners culminated in a visit to the King's Botanical Gardens; where he was presented by Buffon with a specially bound copy of his works, which he declined, saying he would be sorry to deprive him of it.

The brothers of the King were eager to show all welcome; Monsieur and the Comte d'Artois gave a *fête* at Versailles, which Mercy estimated cost 100,000 livres [£4,000]; but the memoirs of this unveracious period place the expense at six times that amount.

Then Mercy gave a supper to which all important personages of the Court, without distinction of party, were invited to meet the Archduke; amongst them came the Duc d'Aiguillon and the Comtesse de Brionne. The Comtesse, forgetful of the Court etiquette, that bade her sink her own personal feeling and not weigh it against the honour of meeting the Archduke, complained to the Queen, who, irritated at the ceaseless annoyances caused by her brother's visit, told Mercy to write and explain to the Comtesse. Which Mercy did "in a way to make her feel politely how very irregular was her conduct."

When Marie Antoinette wrote to her mother

her regret at her brother's departure, she said that he had been polite, straightforward, and attentive to every one. "But he did not succeed so well when things were shown to him, for he was always very indifferent to everything. I hope that at some future time he will be in a condition to profit more by such a journey." She says of the Princes that she does not wish to speak any more of them or their intrigues, that the King forbade them to sup with him for ten or twelve days afterwards, that this period having now elapsed the Prince de Condé and his son had been to supper, "and I treated them just as usual. The Duc d'Orleans and the Prince de Conti have not been yet, but that is because they have the gout."

17 March, 1775.

The position of the Empress Marie Thérèse, opposed both publicly and privately by her son Joseph II. whom she had associated with herself in the Government of Austria, is very pitiful; but it is only to Mercy that she can unburden herself. She writes, on 4 March, of the many annoyances that de Rohan can cause her even in his absence; and their power of wounding is due to the fact that Joseph II. finds the loss of de Rohan's gossip more important to him than the Ambassador's insolence to his mother, and resents the dismissal of a man who provided scandal both in stories and in life. "What grieves me the most is that the Emperor leads the party against de Breteuil [de Rohan's successor at the Embassy]. . . . They criticise his manners, his person, his clothes, and even

his wig! And once it actually happened at a reception that the Emperor, perceiving de Breteuil, made a mocking grimace to the Abbé Georgel, who is a vain and impertinent man. I admonished the Emperor respecting this grimace, which must have been remarked by others as well as by myself."

Abbé Georgel, whose *Mémoires* enshrine so much malice, was the chief instigator of de Rohan's acts of defiance; and an active enemy of those "two most evil counsellors, Abbé de Vermond and Baron de Breteuil," as he styles them.

Marie Thérèse tells Mercy that the Baron de Breteuil has asked her what she would like him to obtain for her from France; and when she had told him that her only wish was for a portrait of Louis XVI. he had replied that this would indeed be difficult to obtain, as he did not believe that such a thing existed in France. That this curious point was true, and no genuine portrait of Louis XVI., painted from life, then existed, is confirmed by Mercy who mentions the difficulty the Ambassadors had in obtaining for their Sovereigns the portrait of the King that is sent, by custom, to all Courts; but in 1775 Louis gave some sittings to the artist Duplessy, then member of the Academy. The date of the magnificent portrait of himself, that Louis gave to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, and I am permitted to reproduce for the first time in this book, is the year 1776.

In Marie Thérèse's letters of 5 March to Marie Antoinette, she touches on the subject of dress:

"Thank Heaven, this everlasting carnival is finished! This exclamation will prove to you that I am very old. . . . I must mention a subject upon which all the *Gazettes* enlarge, and that is your dress. They speak of hair-dressing, a *coiffure* of thirty-six inches high from the roots of the hair, with feathers and ribbons above that again! You know my opinion, to follow fashion in moderation, never to excess. A young and pretty Queen has no need of such follies." To which Marie Antoinette replies: "It is true I am rather taken up with dress; but as to feathers, every one wears them, and it would seem extraordinary if I did not. But since the balls have ceased they are no longer worn so high." Mercy confirms this regretfully, saying that the present mode of headdresses is simply astonishing, "both by its volume and by the immense feathers that form its chief ornament;" and that its amazing expense was already causing quarrels in certain households.

It caused more than quarrels; for its inconvenience was as obvious as its absurdity. Doors became too low to pass through; ladies had to have a top story removed from their heads in an anti-chamber after an ignominious failure to pass through the entrance of a ball-room; they had to make long journeys kneeling upon the floor of the coach with the tops of the headdresses sticking out of the windows; they could no longer enter the boxes at the theatre. "The face looks in the middle of the body," said the Duc de Lauzun. At last ingenuity contrived an

expanding *coiffure*; it was called the *bonnet à la bonne maman*," for in deference to angry parents' presence the headdress could be fixed of reasonable size; and when there was no longer this constraint, the strings could be relaxed and the coiffure rise, by springs, to the three-foot height required by "*bon ton*."

The change to Anglo-mania was therefore of benefit, for many reasons; although to French eyes the contrast was sudden and inelegant, at least in dress. "Our ladies sell their diamonds to buy cut steel and English glass beads. They only wear '*popelines*' or English linen. They stow away their Gobelin tapestries in the cupboards; and cover the walls with blue English paper. They pass their evenings in drinking tea, in eating bread and butter." And all the world goes to the races on the plain of Sablons, to see the Duc de Lauzun ride and win on his own horse in English fashion.

Mercy says: "Lately her Majesty went to see a horse-race that has been held near Paris. Some young people introduced this novelty in imitation of the races in England. The Queen went there with Monsieur and Madame, and the Comte d'Artois. . . . Crowds of people flocked to this poor spectacle; but the Queen was not welcomed with the customary signs of joy and applause. . . . The public sees that the Queen is only thinking of amusements." **18 March, 1775.**

The approaching Coronation of Louis XVI. gives much cause for reflection to Mercy, as he thinks it would be politic if Marie Antoinette were crowned at

the same time. It used to be customary for the Queens to be crowned also, but as Louis XIII., Louis XIV., and Louis XV. were unmarried when they were crowned, precedent had to go back to Marie de Medicis, and the Coronation of Henri IV. in 1594. Mercy discovered that an unpublished manuscript, relating to the ancient consecration ceremonies of the Kings of France and the invariable accompanying Coronation of the Queens, was in existence; and took measures that the precious record should be found by the King, but "so that no one could suspect me of having moved in this matter."

While waiting for the great event of the Coronation, the Court occupies itself with the case of the Comte de Guines, who had been accused of smuggling contraband under the seal of his privilege as Ambassador to Great Britain, and of using his official information to gamble on the London Stock Exchange. Marie Antoinette, with great warmth, protected him, and his secretary was convicted of libel; but the scandal engrossed the Courts of France and Austria for a considerable time.

20 April, 1775.

Another topic of interest served again to show Marie Antoinette's power over the King. The Duc de Fitz-James [grandson of James II., of whose heritage Walpole wrote: "It does not rival Goodwood or Euston!"], a friend of this Comte de Guines, was promised by the Queen the dignity of a Marshal. When the King announced the appointment to his Council, the Comte de Muy rose and opposed it, on

the ground that there were several officers of senior service and greater claims. The King, confused, said he withdrew his appointment. But the Duc de Fitz-James already waited in the ante-chamber, to thank his Majesty; who saw no way out of the difficulty but by appointing seven Marshals, a promotion in bulk that amazed the people, and gave rise to the instant malice of apt description. They were called the Seven Deadly Sins—the Duc de Fitz-James, Envy; the Duc d'Harcourt, Sloth; the Comte de Nicolaï, Gluttony; the Duc de Noailles, Avarice; the Comte de Muy, Wrath; the Comte de Noailles, Pride; and the Duc de Duras, Luxury. And of Louis' first batch of martial Marshals it was said that the only vice lacking among them was—pugnacity!

It took all Mercy's endeavours to assuage the wrath of the army against the Queen for having arranged this list of promotions without service.

The chronic starvation of France had its first outbreak of riot in the beginning of May. Mercy says that when he heard the first threatenings of tumult, he went early to the Queen and stayed with her for a long time, finding her much agitated by the madness of the mob. The price of bread had risen to thirteen sous for four pounds; at Beaumont, St. Germain, and Pontoise, the people had risen in fury; in Paris the outbreak came on 2 May. The news had been brought betimes to that light nimble weathercock de Maurepas, "Little Scoundrelet" ("M. Faquinet"), as he had been called by the

18 May, 1775.

fair de Châteauroux in the long-ago days before his choice epigram against Madame de Pompadour had worked his exile. De Maurepas was living gaily and youthfully in those rooms at Versailles, with the gold shutters, in which Madame du Barry had ruled in more than Imperial magnificence; for his own house in the Rue de Grenelle was streaked with the signs of his exile. He had given orders to his housekeeper to leave the shutters open to avoid damp, during his little period of absence from Court. But it lasted twenty-five years; and everything within range of the windows was so scorched and faded by the results of this implicit obedience that no delicate gentleman could endure the strange effects. Shallow de Maurepas, finding the Versailles life very pleasant, paid no heed to the uncomfortable word "riot"; and went to the Opera instead of summoning a regiment.

The next morning the raging mob was plundering all the baker's shops in Paris; and not bread only did they seize, but everything else that was portable. All the ruffians of Paris joined them, all the thieves from the countryside round; and Paris would have been sacked, but for military measures. With cannon on the ramparts, cavalry in the streets, all the regiments of the King's bodyguard scouring the country, and the *Gardes françaises* to clear away the rabble, peace was restored in a few days, "by hanging a certain number."

With such riots of starved, wretched, ferocious men, rather "frightful wild animals," howling their

hunger at the closed gates of Versailles (whereon is now no box for petitions, receptacle of foul libels), smashing the shops of Paris, and looting what they can, proceed simultaneously the preparations for the Coronation which is to take place in the next month. These half-naked, greasy peasants, their only covering rags of coarse wool and leather fastened with copper nails, starved, cowed, beaten, and madly revengeful, are now employed, by the forced slavery, *corvée*, to make good the roads to Rheims, along which will roll the coaches of the great. They kneel by the roadside as they toil, and lift starved hands for bread to the passers-by ; for while they work upon the *corveé* they earn no money. The gate of Soissons must be removed, for the Royal coach, which is eighteen feet high, to pass through. The Cathedral of Rheims is made fit to receive their Majesties, its interior rendered modern and luxurious ; with all conveniences "*à l'Anglaise*," mirrors and every appliance of toilette for the Queen arranged in the sacred building. Twenty thousand post-horses are placed along the road ; the bridges are repaired. The crown that represents the sovereignty of France, represents also the idle sum, in diamonds, of 18,000,000 livres [£720,000]. The words that Louis XVI. speaks as it is placed upon his doomed head are heard by the six great Princes of the Crown—"Monsieur," the Comte d'Artois, the Duc d'Orléans, the Duc de Chartres, the Prince de Condé, and the Duc de Bourbon. "It hurts me," he said, as

May, 1775.

he raised his hand to it. They recalled the words of Henri III., whose future was assassination: he had said at the touch of the crown: "It pricks me."

Marie Antoinette writes to her mother: "The Coronation was perfection in every way; all the world seemed delighted with the King, and he ought to be delighted with all his subjects, for, from great to lowly, all showed the utmost interest in him; and the Church ceremonies were broken by the most moving acclamations at the moment of the Coronation. I could no longer restrain myself; my tears flowed in spite of me, and the people liked this. I did my best throughout the whole time to return the greetings of the people, although it was very hot and the crowds were very great. But I did not mind my weariness. . . . It is an astonishing thing, and a very happy one, to be so well received two months after the revolt, and in spite of the dearness of bread, which unfortunately still remains. It is an amazing feature in the French character, that they will let themselves be led away so easily by bad counsels; and yet return again so quickly. It is certain that as these people have, out of their misery, treated us so well, we are the more bound to work for their happiness. The King seems to me to realise this truth; as for me, I shall never forget the Coronation all the days of my life, even if I live a hundred years."

Versailles, 22 June, 1775.

Mercy writes fully of the great ceremony. The

departure of the Queen from Compiègne at eight o'clock at night; the crowds of people all along the great moon-lit roads to see her pass; her arrival at Rheims an hour after midnight, with "Monsieur" and with "Madame," and the Comte d'Artois. Then her journey on the next day to meet and welcome the King upon his entrance; and then the Coronation day on 11 June. He mentions the emotion of the Queen at the moment of the Coronation; her tears flowed so fast that she was obliged to leave her seat and retire to regain her composure; she returned amid shouts and applause that echoed through the cathedral, while all the world wept in sympathy; and the King raised his head and looked at her with an adoration that he could not conceal. His Majesty had been greatly affected by her emotion, had spoken incessantly of her tears; and had shown feelings never before stirred in him. He mentions the little walk of the King and Queen arm-in-arm, in simple dress, at seven o'clock in the evening, through the long gallery crowded with visitors, "*de monde, même de peuple*," their Majesties without guards or escort, in the midst of their subjects; and that the people, drunk with joy, greeted them with indescribable warmth. 23 June, 1775.

The final incident of the Coronation was the healing of the sick by the infirm Louis, who touched over two thousand persons for the King's Evil. In the reign of Charles II., ninety-two thousand one hundred and seven persons were touched by the Stuart

monarch ; and it is said that all were cured. But the remedy proved ineffectual in this country, when made in Hanover ; and the custom was dropped in 1714. It is not chronicled what proportion of Louis XVI.'s patients recovered.

CHAPTER IV

The Effects of the Coronation—Interview with the Duc de Choiseul—Louis' Greeting—Marie Antoinette's Indiscretions—The Cyclops of Versailles and the rôle of Venus—The Queen and the Ministers—Anger of Marie Thérèse and the Emperor—Reconciliation—Death of the Comte d'Eu—Birth of a Son to the Comte d'Artois—Marriage of Madame Clotilde—Ladies of the Queen's Household—Daily Life of the Queen—End of 1775

THE Coronation was a ceremony whose effects were lasting. For that day in June, with its glories and its acclamations, the incense of flattery, of immense power, of wealth seemingly without end, was the beginning of changes in both King and Queen. Even to the torpid Louis there must have been something awakening in the ancient ritual that crowned him King of France, something inspiriting in the assumption of a Divine prerogative. Fat, dull, feeble Louis, despised, pushed aside, trodden upon, by his brighter younger brother, had been as a God when he healed by his touch two thousand scrofulous sick who believed in his Divinity ; and the stir of mental quickening ran through his brain, moving him to work and to try and understand.

To Marie Antoinette it had been an intoxication; and the self-control of the Queen of twenty years was not proof against the ambition to play with the power to her hand.

First came the intrigues of the Duc de Choiseul, expected by all; for his return to the ministry was awaited by most. To Rheims went the Duc, in joyful trim, the courtiers all remarking that his "*nez au vent*" had the radiant air of a conqueror. (A glance at his portrait will explain the reference.) Marie Antoinette herself thought that all the way was smooth. She obtained the King's permission for de Choiseul's interview with her, in a way that, later on, caused the greatest outburst of wrath against her from Vienna, when it was discovered by a letter in which the Queen details her little scheme; and speaks lightly of "the poor man," her husband. De Choiseul came, had three-quarters of an hour's interview with the Queen; and employed that time in soliciting favours, to Mercy's keen disgust.

"He praised the Queen for her warmth in defending
17 July, 1775. the Comte de Guines, and added that her Majesty ought to make him a Knight of the *Cordon Bleu*. The Queen replied that first this honour must be bestowed upon the Baron de Breteuil [present Ambassador to Vienna]. . . . The Duc de Choiseul made many slighting remarks about his old and faithful friend, de Breteuil, to the Queen's surprise. He then asked her Majesty to obtain the titles of Duc for the Prince de Beauvau, and the Comte du Châtelet.

To this the Queen replied conditionally; but without absolute refusal. He made no actual demand for himself, but recalled categorically all the wrongs he had suffered, especially the deprivation of the command of the Suisses regiment. . . . Altogether his interview betrayed more intrigue than zeal for the Queen."

The favours he demanded, on a first interview, after such long absence, were not noticeably modest, as all were for relatives and connections of his own family. The de Châtelets come into the history of the Revolution, dramatically enough. The sister of the Duc de Choiseul, Béatrix Duchesse de Gramont, was arrested; on her trial she was offered her life if she would betray the hiding-place of the young Comte de Châtelet. "Never," said she; "treachery is a civic virtue too modern for me." And she employed all her famous wit and eloquence in pleading, not for her own life but for that of her friend, the Duchesse de Châtelet. Both perished together. The Prince de Beauvau was a noble of a great Lorraine family; to his wife many names were given. She had "*l'esprit de principauté*," was called "*la Dominante des dominations*;" and was so permeated with knowledge of thrones, dominions, and powers, that she assured Madame de Genlis she was acquainted with the etiquette and ceremonial of Paradise.

All these hopeful buds of intrigue put forth by the Choiseul party were brought to naught unexpectedly by the "*pauvre homme*," Louis himself, who growled:

"Who says Choiseul, means extortion;" and to a second suggestion replied: "Never mention that man to me again!" His reception of the Duc himself was no more cordial; his only greeting was: "You have grown very fat, M. de Choiseul, you are losing your hair, you are getting bald!" The hopes of a triumphant return to power withered in this chill; and never flowered again.

The letters of Marie Antoinette, to which reference has been made, which gave such just offence by their frivolity, to her mother and the Emperor Joseph, were written to the Comte de Rosenberg, after his visit to Paris in the suite of her brother Maximilian. The Comte de Rosenberg was an old family friend, the confidant of Marie Thérèse for forty years, and Marie Antoinette did not realise the extent of her indiscretion, and had forgotten the difference of standard between the Court of Vienna, so rigidly reserved, and that of Versailles, where all was pardoned to "*esprit.*"

She wrote: "The pleasure that I had in talking
17 April, 1775. to you, Monsieur, should assure you of that with which I received your letter. I shall never be uneasy as to any stories concerning me that may travel to you at Vienna. You know Paris and Versailles; you have seen and can judge. If I were in need of apologies for my acts, I should rely fully upon you; frankly I can confess more need than you suggest. For instance, my tastes are not those of the King, who has none, except for hunting and

mechanic's labour. You will agree that I should be out of place beside a forge. I should not do for Vulcan ; and the rôle of Venus might possibly displease him more than my tastes, of which he does not disapprove. . . .

"Our life now does not resemble the time of the Carnival. Appreciate my misfortune, for the devotions of Holy Week have given me a worse cold than all the balls. You will agree that this was only to be expected. I have instituted a series of Monday concerts in my apartments, which are charming. All etiquette is laid aside. I sing in company of some chosen ladies, who sing also. There are a few entertaining men, who are no longer young—M. de Duras, the Duc de Noailles, the Baron de Besenval, d'Esterhazy, M. de Polignac, de Guéménée, and two or three others. This lasts from six till nine o'clock, and seems tedious to no one."

The allusions to her husband in this letter were sufficiently slighting ; but the letter of July was that which Rosenberg laid before the Empress.

"I must tell you about my conduct in M. d'Aiguillon's affair. His dismissal was entirely my work. His measure was overflowing. This bad man encouraged all manner of spying and evil deeds. He tried to flout me more than once in the affair of M. de Guines. Directly after the verdict I demanded his exile from the King. True, I did not insist upon a *lettre de cachet* ; but nothing was lost by that, for instead of remaining in

13 July, 1775.

Touraine, as he wished, they requested him to continue his journey to Aiguillon, which is in Gascony.

"You may have heard that I gave an audience to the Duc de Choiseul at Rheims. They talked of it so much that I can answer for the fact that old Maurepas was afraid to go home and rest. You can believe that I did not see him without first speaking to the King; but you would never guess how adroitly I managed, so as not to appear to have asked for the permission. I said to him that I should like to see M. de Choiseul, but I could not decide upon the day. I acted so well that the poor man himself arranged the most convenient hour for me to see him. I fancy I used my skill as a woman well in that matter.

"At last we have got rid of M. de la Vrillière. Although he is very deaf, he knew well enough that it was time to go, lest the door should be shut in his face. . . .

"I have another plan in my head. The Maréchale de Mouchy [Comtesse de Noailles] is going to leave the Court, they say. . . . I have asked the King to let me have Madame de Lamballe as Superintendent of my Household. Think how lucky I am; I shall make my dearest friend happy, and shall have the pleasure of seeing more of her. This is a secret, and I shall not yet tell the Empress."

When Rosenberg laid these letters before the Empress there was an explosion. She writes to Mercy: "I am cut to the heart. What a style! What a manner of thought! It confirms

31 July, 1775.

my dread ; she is rushing, by great steps, to her ruin, and she will be fortunate if, in her fall, she retains even the virtues of her rank. If Choiseul returns to the ministry she is lost. . . . I see clearly that my anxieties in these last two years were well founded."

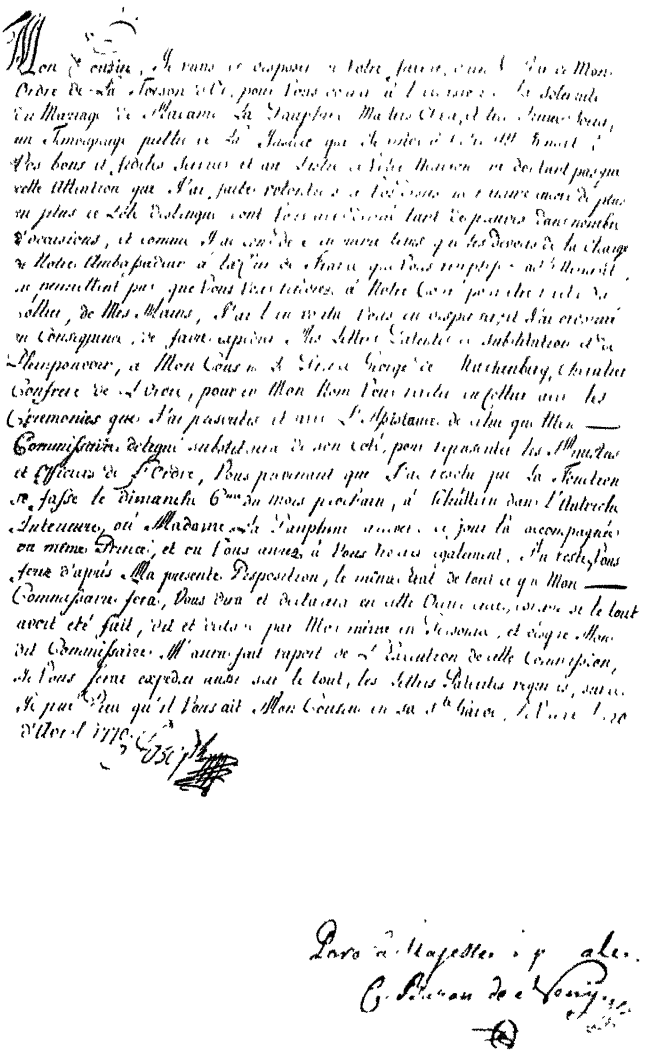
But the furious letter of the Emperor Joseph, so unmeasured in its anger, so bitter in its remarks, was never actually received by Marie Antoinette, as her mother prevented its despatch. In it he said : " You, my sister, to take upon yourself to displace ministers ; you, to exile one to his estates ; you, to give departments to this or to that ; you, to take measures to gain an action for another ; you, to create new offices ; you, to meddle in the government of the French monarchy ! . . . How do you dare to imagine that your advice or opinion can be of any use in any matter ? . . . You, an amiable young person, thinking only of frivolity, or your toilette, or your amusements, all day ; who never read, and never hear sense talked for a quarter of an hour a month ! " And so on for pages, that rest in the Archives of Vienna and never reached the "amiable young person" whom they would so fiercely have affronted ; a milder letter was despatched in the end.

Mercy is at great pains to soften the relations between the Austrian family and Marie Antoinette. 16 August, 1775. He begs the Empress to observe that in the whole letter there is nothing more reprehensible than the little vanity that wishes to pose as governing the King; that her references to her husband were

but jesting, and that, as a matter of fact, she did not only esteem her husband, but was jealous of his reputation; that only in little impulses of levity and vanity did she ever depart from her rule of respect; and that in all fundamental principles of morals and conduct the Queen was beyond all reproach. He describes the effect of the letters of the Empress and the Emperor upon Marie Antoinette. Of the former she said: "My mother sees things but from the distance, she does not weigh them in regard to my position; and she judges me too harshly. But she is my mother, who loves me dearly; and when she speaks, I can only bow my head." The latter had only caused such irritation "that she gave little movements of anger," seeing in her brother's severity only the desire to dominate her; and the intention of treating her as a child.

Mercy remarks that he sat in absolute silence for a full half-hour, until the Queen, struck by this, calmed down and asked him what he thought of the matter.

Two incidents of interest were the death of the Comte d'Èu, who was the grandson of Louis XIV. by Madame de Montespan, his father being the Duc de Maine; and the birth of a son to the Comte d'Artois. By the extinction of the line of the Duc de Maine, many estates and houses reverted to the Crown; by the birth of the infant Duc d'Angoulême, an heir was given to the throne of France; but his chief claim to remembrance in after life is that he married the daughter of Marie Antoinette, the little



LETTER FROM JOSEPH II., EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA,

To the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau on conferring the order of the Golden Fleece.

(From the original document at the Château d'Argenteau.) [*Page* 429.

sad-faced "*Madame Royale*," always called "*Mousseline la sérieuse*," who outlived him, and died in 1845, aged sixty-seven years.

Changes take place at Court. Madame Clotilde, "*le gros madame*" is now sixteen, and leaves Paris upon her marriage to the Prince of Piedmont. 28 August, 1775. "She seemed but lightly afflicted by this separation," says Marie Antoinette, who sympathises deeply with the despair of the little sister, Elizabeth, left behind so easily by Clotilde. "This poor little thing has been ill with grief, and she is very delicate;" and the Queen consoles the little forlorn child of eleven, who was one of the innocent victims guillotined in 1794. Fresh appointments are made; of the Princesse de Lamballe (whose loyal father-in-law, the immensely wealthy Duc de Penthièvre, would not let her accept the honour of Superintendent of the Household until the revenues were increased to 150,000 livres [£6,000], at which a King, bent on economy, was not pleased); of the Princesse de Guéménée (who was separated from her husband, but found her *ménage* doubled thereby instead of halved, with the aid of the Duc de Coigny, and Madame de Dillon), appointed Governess to the Royal children, in advance; of the Princesse de Chimay (the useful friend of the Baron de Breteuil), of whom Mercy writes, she is "sweet, seductive, false, and intriguing"; of the Comtesse de Mailly, "young, sincere, *très-nonchalante*"; of the Comtesse de Polignac, very like Madame de Mailly, but with less wit, and "with an aunt of very bad

repute;" and of many similar ladies. Marie Thérèse thanks Mercy for his descriptions of the ladies of her daughter's Court, but is not at all reassured that Marie Antoinette's circle has any merits; and says, with brisk common sense, that a Superintendent of the Household who faints at seeing a man spring into the Seine (the Queen had gone out on a gondola) seems to her affected.

Lauzun tells us the Princesse de Lamballe always fainted at the sight of a bunch of violets, or of a lobster; and she made a point of fainting twice a week, at fixed hours, for a whole year.

The daily life of the Queen differed but little from that of the Dauphine. Mercy describes it:

15 November, 1775.

"Her Majesty rises about ten o'clock, that is about two hours later than the King. . . . Then the Abbé de Vermond arrives about ten, and remains until "Monsieur" arrives, or the Comte d'Artois, or some Princesse of the Royal family. Often after these visits the Queen spends a quarter of an hour with the King in his room before commencing her toilette, at which time those privileged to enter come and pay their Court. Then is time for Mass, which is followed by half-an-hour's lesson on the harp. At half-past one, the dinner, which lasts only a very short time; and then follows an hour's conversation with the Royal family, which assembles in the house of the Queen, or sometimes at "Madame's" or at the Comtesse d'Artois', or at Mesdames' house. From three to six the time is variously divided,

between the Abbé de Vermond, myself, music, the Queen's favourites, and outside people to whom she gives audience. . . . At six o'clock there is some entertainment, three, sometimes four, times a week; if there is none, then play till nine o'clock, after which follows supper. On Sundays this is in public; Mondays and Saturdays the King sups with the Queen in presence of those having the entry; Tuesdays and Thursdays the supper is in the Cabinet, where Courtiers and the Court ladies join; and Wednesdays and Fridays their Majesties have their supper carried to Madame's apartments. From ten to twelve, half-past twelve, and even one o'clock, the time is spent in different ways, but till a quarter past eleven the Queen stays with the Royal family; afterwards her Majesty goes to the Princesse de Lamballe (who gives suppers four times a week) or to the Princesse de Guéménée . . . and this time is the most critical in the day."

Mercy had good grounds to fear these nightly visits, for each favourite had her circle of intriguers. The Princesse de Lamballe drew all that set "that they call here the 'Palais-Royal,'" the Duc de Chartres, her brother-in-law, and all his friends; while to the Princesse de Guéménée went the Comtesse de Polignac, the Baron de Besenval, and others.

Mercy says: "I see myself under the necessity of trying to maintain a sort of equilibrium in the different affections of the Queen"; and he employs every means in his power to dissuade her

from lavish generosity towards these favourites which could only serve to lower her own prestige.

The most unwarrantable demand was made by the Princesse de Lamballe on behalf of the Comtesse de la Marche. This was the daughter-in-law of the Prince de Conti, who, being separated from her husband, had the assurance to demand the pension that was given, (as a grace not a right,) to the *widow* of a Prince of the Blood, if she were one whom the King wished particularly to honour. Mercy pointed out that the Princesse de Lamballe and her brother together were costing the State more than 100,000 écus [£12,000] a year, and that any further charges on her behalf would be highly injudicious.

CHAPTER V

The Winter of 1775-1776—Sleigh-drives—Diamonds and their Cost—The Opposition to Reform—The Opera Ball on Shrove Tuesday—Marie Antoinette's Amusements—Her Influence in Politics—The Fall of Turgot and its Causes—Measles at Court—The Comtesse Jules de Polignac—The Comtesse Diane—The Death of the Prince de Conti—Madame de Boufflers—Extravagances of Marie Antoinette

THE winter with which 1775 ended and 1776 began was a very bitter one, both in Europe and in America. Great Britain's war with her American colonies was taxing all her resources; and the struggle of the Americans was watched in France with the intentness of an interest founded on sympathy and fostered by desire of imitation. All over Europe the pressure was felt; Hesse, Brunswick and other German principalities were scoured for men to assist the British troops; and they were expensive purchases. Washington's name was beginning to be heard; the Americans were holding their own with "minute-men" and armed camps, with the fixed determination of Independence and no more proffering of "Olive-Branches."

France, on the verge of national bankruptcy, found its remedies no improvement upon its diseases; un-

comprehended reforms were plunging it into despair; ministers disappeared like shadows the moment their schemes of taxation touched privileged pockets; bread was dearer than ever; influenza (then a comparative novelty, not, as now, regular as a recurring decimal) was raging; fuel was unobtainable; and France was held for six weeks in the grip of an awful frost.

But, in compensation, the snow was deep and all the Court went for sleigh-drives.

Versailles, 14 January, 1776.

Marie Antoinette writes: "There is so great a quantity of snow here that nothing like it has been seen for years; so we go in sleighs as we used to do in Vienna. We were driving yesterday, and to-day there is a great "*course*" in Paris; but as they have never yet seen a Queen take part in one, they would invent stories, and I would rather give up the pleasure than be bothered by more stories."

It was no new fashion for the French Court; the late Dauphin, father of Louis XVI had been fond of this exercise, but it pleased the French to term it "Austrian," although every coach-house turned out its old sleighs, that had done previous service at an earlier Court. The Princes and great nobles all drove them; the Queen's sleighs sang with little bells and fluttered with white feathers, and Marie Antoinette drove in them, wrapped in great furs, in the park at Versailles.

But the fashion spread, and ladies, "*de toutes les espèces*," drove, masked, through the streets of Paris

at night; and as the charitable public considered every sleigh must contain Marie Antoinette, the Queen soon dropped this pleasure.

Then Mercy has to relate the extravagance of diamond sprays, for which the jeweller asked 600,000 francs [£24,000], and the Queen longed so greatly to possess them, in spite of Mercy's entreaties for economy, that she agreed to buy them for 460,000 francs [£18,400] the payment to extend over four years. (It was just two years since the scornful rejection of the du Barry diamonds.) The Empress, severe as she was upon follies, would have offered to pay part of this debt to relieve her daughter of its weight; but Mercy dissuaded her, lest Marie Antoinette be encouraged. 19 January, 1776.

Then comes the struggle between Louis XVI. and his unrighteous Parliament. Summoned, again to represent the liberties of the people upon the fall of the hated Maupeou, they found presented to them the following reforms, amongst others, prepared by Turgot, with the approval of Louis: suppression of trade monopolies, abolition of the dreaded "*corvée*" or forced service, and the extension of taxes so as to include the property of the nobility. The Parliament rejected them all. The reason of this scandalous resistance to reforms lay in the fact that the three classes exempt from taxation were those of the nobility, clergy, and members of Parliament; and they refused to pay even a share of the burdens of the people they represented.

Mercy's chief task now, in writing to Marie Thérèse, is furnishing explanations of the lies that crowd to Vienna. He says, in answer to questions from Marie Thérèse: "It is quite true that Paris abounds in news; but its absurdity is so obvious and so well known that I have never seen fit to write it. . . . There are many people here who have no other trade or livelihood than writing for these "*gazettins*." If they have no facts, they make up something with which to fill their sheets. . . . The most simple things are presented under an infinity of shapes; and it is often impossible for those who have been on the spot and seen things with precision, to imagine how a most unremarkable fact, of which they have been witnesses, could have given rise to such fables."

28 February, 1776.

Even he has to admit that the incident to which reference was made had possibilities of expansion. The Queen, "Monsieur," the Comte d'Artois, and the Duchesse de Luynes had gone to the Opera Ball on Shrove Tuesday. Although there was a great crush, the Queen would walk in the crowd, as all the Royal party were masked. A mask, in a black domino, roughly pushed "Monsieur," who struck him with his fist. The mask complained to the sergeant on guard, who arrested "Monsieur." Then the officer of Monsieur's suite explained; the sergeant withdrew, and the incident ended.

The stories, upon such basis of fact, took vast form; and included every detail that fervid imagina-

tions, inspired by opportunity, could add. But Opera Balls, with or without indiscretions, were less harmful than politics, wherein, despite every remonstrance, the Queen used her influence over the weak King in all appointments.

Mercy tells of horse-races, "a puerile parody of those they have in England," with a stand built for the Queen, surrounded by a "concourse of unsuitable persons, young and ill-clothed, making much confusion and noise"; of dinners in the Bois de Boulogne, "at a house bought by the Comte d'Artois called Bagatelle;" of parties given by the Princesse de Guéménée, where play is high and the scenes are lively, and the tables and cards hidden a quarter of an hour before the King is expected; of a ball at the Palais-Royal, given by the Duc de Chartres, to which the Queen went, although such act was unusual; of Balls at the Opera, where the Queen stayed all night, came back to Versailles at half-past six in the morning and went off again at ten to the races. He also tells of constant changes in the Court. The confessor Maudoux, late the spiritual adviser of Louis XV., is now blind and deaf, a new confessor must be found; and "it would be a real gift from Heaven if a virtuous man were found for this post." For Archbishop Beaumont, "a pious prelate, but un-enlightened," and a friend of Jesuitism; and the Curé de Versailles "an intriguer of the first degree," are the two candidates for the office. The Comte de Guines has won his action for libel through the hot interest of Marie Antoinette; and

13 April, 1776.

instead of punishment for alleged smuggling and misused official knowledge has received a dukedom and a flattering letter, three times copied out by the docile King until its phrases pleased the Queen.

De Malesherbes has left the Ministry; and de Maurepas' friend, the witless Amelot, succeeded him. Turgot has fallen, swept away by the resentment of a Parliament unexpectedly required to fulfil its duties to the State, and of a Queen whom he had opposed; and despatched with such haste, that he had not even time to complete his scheme of finance. He is succeeded by Clugny de Nuis, who replaces all the old "consecrated" evils, re-establishes the *corvée*, brings back the old monopolies of wardenships and companies; and, to gain money from the exhausted nation, institutes public lotteries. In all of these changes the influence of the Queen is openly shown, without care to hide the power she wields. Louis is made to write to the Comte de Guines; he writes also to the Comte de Vergennes about the case, the letters are contradictory, the sentiments in them of absolutely opposite views; and Louis is shown, a crowned "*pantin*," compromising his dignity and that of his ministers.

12 May, 1776.

Turgot fell because he had acted in the recall of de Guines who serves as the shuttlecock of intrigue, tossed between the Choiseul party and that of Aiguillon. Marie Antoinette, to whom the world consisted of partisans of Aiguillon or allies of Choiseul, led away by her hatred of the Duc d'Aiguillon, held that all who were not for her were against her; and

swept Turgot from the work that might have saved her own life, although he had accomplished more reforms in these few months of office than had been attempted in the fifty-nine years of Louis XV.'s reign.

Only Mercy's urgent insistence prevailed to prevent her power being exercised with a rigour that savoured of personal feeling; her intention was that the same day should bestow the Bastille on Turgot and the dukedom on Guines, but Mercy's "strongest and most pressing representations" saved this. He writes to Marie Thérèse that the Choiseul party, which now entirely surrounds Marie Antoinette, "succeeds to such an extent in making the Queen beside herself, that what with the intoxication of amusements and the extreme weakness of the King, there are times when it is impossible for reason to penetrate this circle. . . . The Abbé de Vermond and I have to use the greatest prudence in our efforts to lessen the evil, that we may not lose the opportunity of future endeavours. We have seen, in this time of great effervescence, that the Queen was irritated at our remonstrances; that she tried to evade them. Last week, when her projects were being executed, she avoided, adroitly, giving me any opportunity of speaking to her. Our efforts only result in rendering us hated by all those who surround and lead the Queen astray."

In Marie Antoinette's own letters to her mother, she says nothing of her share in these political changes; she even denies having exercised any influence, and the letters are found very "sterile," 13 June, 1776.

in consequence. Upon one subject she writes fully, the Court *coiffure* concerning which Marie Thérèse has expressed curiosity. She sends her mother sketches of the different modes. "You may think them ridiculous; but here our eyes are so much accustomed to them that we do not, as every one wears the same. . . . For ladies of a certain age the mode is different, as there is a difference in everything connected with dress and appearance, excepting in the matter of rouge, which old people still use here, sometimes more profusely than the young ones. Then, after forty-five years of age, they wear colours less showy and bright, their dresses fit less tightly and are not so light, and their hair is less curled and not worn so high."

Then, by way of convincing her mother that she is not neglecting serious things, she adds that she has taken up reading again, and is studying the English historian, Lawrence Echard's "Roman History." She might with more profit have studied the history, then in the making, of America, for her next letter is dated in July, 1776, the date of American Independence. But "*qui fait l'histoire, l'oublie et ne sait pas la lire.*"

July, 1776. The calendar of the Court is dated by diseases (from which there is scarcely an interval of freedom); and the eventful July is marked by measles. The Comte d'Artois was first to take it, and so seriously that his life was considered in danger for some days. No one was in the least interested; the Comtesse d'Artois was so unconcerned that the news gave her no shock, although she was in a delicate

state of health; but Marie Antoinette took the precaution of removing her infant nephew, the Duc d'Angoulême, from risk of infection, to her own house, the Petit Trianon, where the model dairy was very convenient. Then "Monsieur" (now almost as fat and unwieldy as the King), then Madame Elizabeth, fell ill. The most perfect indifference continued, Marie Antoinette confessed that she was little concerned with what happened to either; and the King gave not the slightest sign of affection for his brothers. But the news that the Princesse de Lamballe had been attacked with measles, when staying at Plombières, filled the Queen with anxiety and affection, although she had developed a marked preference for the Comtesse Jules de Polignac, who was one of the most favoured ladies of the Court.

There were two branches of the old de Polignac family, the younger branch passing by the distaff side to the family of Chalençons, who took the name of de Polignac. Of this there were the Comte de Polignac, his nephew Jules and his wife and his sister. All accounts agree that the Comtesse Jules de Polignac was adorably pretty. Madame de Créquy says she had "exquisite manners, a skin with the whiteness of a narcissus, deliciously soft eyes, scarlet charming lips, and little pink tips to her fingers." Madame Campan describes her equally delightfully, "middle height, fresh and lovely complexion, dark hair and beautiful brown eyes, superb teeth, enchanting smile, and graceful in every movement." When these two sharp-tongued

ladies describe her so enthusiastically, it is no wonder that Marie Antoinette, charmed with the gentle, sincere little Comtesse, thought she had discovered a friend, who with the Princesse de Lamballe, would give her the pleasures of intimate companionship.

The Countess Diane de Polignac, sister-in-law of the pretty Comtesse Jules, differed very greatly from her. It was said she had no other connection with Diana than that she was furiously vindictive. She had, according to the same authority, round eyes, red skin, and bristling hair, and was called "*la lune rousse.*" Louis XVI. gave her the unusual favour of a diploma, which raised her to the brevet-rank of lady, by means of which a gap in her grand-maternal quarterings of nobility was bridged.

The death of the Prince de Conti was an event of great interest to France. He was born in 1717, and was thus fifty-nine years old. He was the fourth in descent from Armand de Bourbon, brother of the Grand Condé; and had been married at eighteen, to Louise Diane d'Orléans (daughter of the Regent d'Orléans). He had obtained from Louis XV. in 1749, the title of Grand Prior of France, with revenues of 100,000 livres [£4,000] a year, and a convenient dispensation from taking any vows as long as his son (Comte de la Marche) remained unmarried. This, the "last of the Princes," had two claims to remembrance. He owed his success to his position as an opponent of the Crown; but he owed that position to his failure to obtain a crown. Had he

2 August, 1776.

been made King of Poland—by favour of Madame de Châteauroux—he could not well have represented the anti-monarchical party against Louis XV. and Madame du Barry. But a character so full of paradoxes as his might have reconciled even these views. The Prince de Ligne said of him that he was "in turns, proud, affable, ambitious, philosophical, discontented, greedy, indolent, noble, debauched, gracious, and eloquent . . . the handsomest, most majestic of men fit for anything, capable of nothing."

He was the only one of the Royal house who declined the rites of the Church, and he replied to Archbishop de Beaumont that after ripe consideration of the matter he would rather die unaided; he was also the only one who had no fear of death, and he saw, betimes, to the careful fitting of his coffin, trying it himself repeatedly, so that the measurements should be right. As Grand Prior of France he had magnificent rooms in the Temple, where he lived with much liberality of mind and money; but "*l'Idole du Temple*," before whom was offered "incense, incense, that is all she asks," was no graven image, although, curiously enough, she was connected also with another Temple, the Inner Temple, where she visited Dr. Johnson on her visit to London. Boswell mentions that Johnson thought it would be gallant of him to run down and see the lady into her coach at Temple Gate. But the effect upon Madame de Boufflers was not impressive; as he had on "a rusty brown morning

suit, a pair of old shoes by way of slippers, a little shrivelled wig sticking on the top of his head, and the sleeves of his shirt and the knees of his breeches hanging loose."

Madame de Boufflers exercised the greatest influence over the Prince de Conti for many years, entertained his guests at the Temple, and did the honours of his house with a fidelity that was considered remarkable. Walpole said of her, "She is two women, the upper and the lower . . . the lower still has pretensions. She is past forty, and does not appear ever to have been handsome, but is one of the most agreeable and sensible women I ever saw. . . . She is *sçavante* and *galante*, a great friend of the Prince de Conti, and a passionate admirer of *nous autres Anglois*."

Madame de Boufflers, upon this widowhood, retired in deep affliction into the seclusion of the country. At least, she went as far as Auteuil first and Arles afterwards, where she again installed herself in a comfortable niche.

The Comtesse d'Artois' second child, a daughter, was born (she died in 1783); and Mercy writes that it is a remarkably tiny baby, and that the Duc d'Angoulême is similarly small, "he does not grow in the least, and seems very sickly. The Comte d'Artois behaved very well on this occasion; he gave his wife 1,000 louis [£960] as a present, upon the advice of the Queen."

17 August, 1776.

Poor Marie Antoinette, without hope of children of her own, adopts a pretty little peasant boy of

three years old, who is lively and gay, and amuses the Queen, and who, as even Mercy admits, is "neither turbulent nor troublesome." This is the first introduction of that revolutionary, who in after years was the fiercest leader against Marie Antoinette at Versailles, and was killed in 1792, in the battle of Jemappes.

In his letter of this date Mercy bewails the reckless extravagance into which the Queen is falling. There are diamond bracelets bought, "worth, I should think, 100,000 écus [£12,000];" and the business dealings of Marie Antoinette are particularly condemned, in that she gave some of her own diamonds, in part payment, receiving a ridiculously small sum for them. Then a previous debt of 100,000 francs [£400] had taken all available money, "and nothing remained in hand for current expenses. In these circumstances the Queen had no other course to adopt than that (which she took with reluctance), of asking 2,000 louis [£1,920] from the King. The monarch received this demand with his customary gentleness, only saying mildly he was not astonished to find the Queen penniless, considering her taste for diamonds. And the 2,000 louis were given the next morning." When Marie Antoinette received from her mother a rebuke for such follies ("this humiliating story of the diamonds! This French levity and all these extraordinary fashions!") she merely remarked, "So the tale of my bracelets has got to Vienna!"

17 September, 1776.

Then, besides diamonds, there is reckless expenditure

upon horses, "which has only commenced since the death of the late King, but is already very considerable. Directly after the King's death, she increased her stable by forty horses. When she was only Dauphine she had a large number of saddle-horses; last year she made a new appointment of another Master of Horse, which has entailed a fresh increase of horses; and the expense consequent upon this new appointment, in horses, carriages, and the like, has been estimated at 25,000 to 30,000 livres [£1,200]. The late Queen never had more than one hundred and fifty horses; the Queen will have three hundred when M. de Polignac has finished the purchases now arranged; and the expenses, therefore, will exceed those of the late Queen by over 200,000 livres [£8,000]. Appointments, carrying large pensions, are given freely. There is the appointment of the Princesse de Lamballe, which creates a place good for nothing but opportunities for quarrels and dissensions at Court, at a cost of 150,000 livres a year [£6,000], besides further sums; and causes further inconveniences by the provision of apartments for this Princesse at Versailles, Compiègne, and Fontainebleau. . . .

"But still more disastrous are the favours that are now in the power of this Superintendent [Princesse de Lamballe] to grant: a pension of 40,000 livres [£1,600] to her brother, besides 14,000 livres [£560] pay as Colonel, although a Colonel's pay is only 4,000 livres [£160]; 50,000 livres [£2,000] to the Comtesse pe la Marche, although this pension is only given

to widowed Princesses of the Blood; 40,000 livres pension to the Chevalier de Luxembourg—all these given at the instance of the Princesse de Lamballe, but attributed by the public to the Queen. . . .

"Another pension, much smaller, but much more scandalous (it is only 6,000 livres [£240]) has been given to Madame Andlau, formerly under-governess to Madame Adélaïde, dismissed and exiled for having lent an infamous book to this Princess. . . . Perhaps the Queen had no part in this pension, but who is to believe that? It was given at the instance of Madame de Polignac, her niece, and favourite of the Queen." [This was the "aunt of very bad repute."]

"The Queen now plays very high; she no longer enjoys games where the stakes are limited, but always plays lansquenet, or faro except in public. Her ladies and the courtiers are alarmed, and dread the losses to which they are exposed in order to pay their court to the Queen. It is true that high play displeases the King; and they hide it from him as much as possible."

Louis' idea of play was limited to blind-man's buff, or loto, or tric-trac, and when he found himself obliged to take a hand at cards, and lost, he paid the sum out of his savings on his personal expenses.

But what had given the public much ground for comment was the building of a theatre at Trianon, where the Queen gave "a most expensive fête" followed by a supper. This charming little theatre—built like a temple, with Ionian columns, decorated in white and

gold, the boxes and stalls of Royal blue velvet, with pilasters of lion's heads, and ornaments of branching oak, whose ceiling was painted by Lagrenée with the clouds of Olympus, and where nymphs disported upon the drop scene—plays a great part in Marie Antoinette's amusements, and furnished more subject for scandal than did the re-arrangement of the whole garden, from the plan of Louis XV. to an "*English* garden, which will cost at least 50,000 livres [£2,000]." The taste for "English" gardens was marked in the eighteenth century; for the term conveyed smooth green lawns, trees not clipped in shovel-form, a stream of flowing water, mounds and rising ground, and, if possible, a few ruins. This was the idea of Marie Antoinette.

In return for the fête given at the Trianon, "Monsieur" gave an entertainment at Brunoy, which Mercy describes as very brilliant, and by which "Monsieur" endeavoured to win a little more regard from Marie Antoinette, who treated him very coldly. The great art of the fête was compliment. Wherever Marie Antoinette walked through the gardens and the park she found sleeping warriors in a lethargy due to the absence of beauty. The approach of the Queen caused all to wake, while tuneful voices announced the reason. Then followed jousts in which there was, naturally, no anxiety as to the success of the Queen's colours; which Marie Antoinette and her Court watched from high-throned terraces. All very much in the spirit of the time; and all costing an incredible sum.

4 October, 1776.

There is no record in Mercy's letters of the life of Madame du Barry, although this has its part in all the memoirs of the time, as the splendour of her past shone the more in contrast with the quiet present. She had been permitted to leave the convent of Pont-aux-Dames in the previous year, and was now settled in the château of St. Vrain, situated exactly the requisite ten leagues from Paris. She had bought the château, the estate of 140 acres, and the furniture for the sum of 215,000 livres [£8,600]; and had selected this residence because it had belonged to the son of the old lady to whom Jeanne Bécu had been companion in the humble years before she ruled Europe,—if not from a throne, at least from the arm of the King's chair. In the winter whose snowfall gave Marie Antoinette her sleigh drives and Paris the material for calumny, Madame du Barry was snowed up at St. Vrain; and she played "*Trou-Madame*," a game where balls, some of ivory, some of lead, were thrown into holes similar to those on a bagatelle board, and Madame du Barry backed herself to throw in nine out of every nineteen. On 15 November she was free to visit Paris and Louveciennes, but took small advantage of it, and remained quietly at St. Vrain.

CHAPTER VI

The Queen's Amusements—The Young Pretender—The Races—Anglo-mania—The Jockeys and the Comte d'Artois—A Bad Loser—The Court Suppers—The Extinguishing of Etiquette—Gambling at Court—Faro for Thirty-six Hours—High Stakes—The Prince de Ligne—Court Privileges—The Duc de Lauzun.

THE passing of the year of 1776 shows the gradual chilling of the correspondence between mother and daughter; the letters change, those of Marie Thérèse grow more dryly rebuking, of Marie Antoinette, more flippant, more casual, and more forgetful. She sends one with the usual expressions of devotion snipped off short, despatched with the words "my respect and my tenderness," as it were, still in her mouth. She forgets to write for her mother's *fête* day; she glances over the matter of the rebukes with a mere reference. And Mercy grows warm with repetitions.

Fontainebleau, 18 October.

"I observe that the amusements of the Queen are multiplying, less by variety of the objects than by the greater time taken up in pure dissipation, which consumes three parts of the day. Music for several hours each day, hunting,

frequent excursions to the different sights of Paris, many times to the Opera, to the theatre. . . . In the theatre an accident happened which caused great alarm. From the third tier a stool fell, directly upon the Queen's box, and thence into the orchestra, breaking a musician's instrument. If the Queen's arms had been extended upon the front of the box they would have been injured. In her Majesty's goodness, she forbade any search being made for the authors of such an insult. . . ."

More races are described; M. d'Artois backed one of his horses against those of some Englishman, who had brought his over; and the latter won, to the unconcealed anger of the Prince. Marie Thérèse had asked Mercy for his advice, whether she should speak plainly to de Breteuil who was coming to Paris, that he might carry her words to Marie Antoinette. Mercy says no, that de Breteuil is honest and straightforward; "but after all he is human, is ambitious, and has everything to hope from the Queen. He should never speak to her upon matters of conduct."

"With regard to the Emperor Joseph's visit, I am convinced that his journey in France will have a powerful effect, whether for good or for evil; and it is impossible to say which it will be. It is quite certain that every one here will be struck with the great personal qualities of the Emperor, and that they will pay him every tribute on their account; but I fear that his Majesty's penetration will strip bare all the faults of this nation, especially those of the present Government, and that he will conceive a disgust whose effects

may be incalculable. I am also afraid that his Majesty will find too much to blame in the conduct of his sister; and coldness may ensue, possibly quarrels. The Queen always receives your Majesty's reprimands good-heartedly and with respect, even if not with implicit obedience; but reprimands from her august brother would be very different."

As to Mercy's own remonstrances, he is in despair; Marie Antoinette continues to tell him all her ideas, quite confidently, even those that had always raised his disapproval; she listens to all his reasons "presented with frankness and with zeal," she "deigns often to discuss them and admit their weight;" but she never thinks of acting upon them. As no single change took place in her habits or resolutions in consequence of these remonstrances, Mercy one day observed to her that she appeared to consult him simply so as to know in advance everything that could be said against the plans she was quite determined to carry out.

Abbé de Vermond again resolves to retire, but Mercy props his failing spirit, lest he lose another voice with the Queen, "in this whirlpool of youth with which her Majesty is surrounded."

Mercy reveals that he had discovered Marie Antoinette in a state of great uneasiness and agitation because she had forgotten to write to her mother for her *fête* day. Should she ante-date the letter and send it by post? or could Mercy invent any other plan?

But he, knowing that Marie Thérèse would never

believe this time-worn expedient, advised her simply to confess her forgetfulness; and beg pardon. This she did in a very short, very uninteresting little letter; acknowledged in one, equally short, in which the Empress says that she would rather Marie Antoinette followed her counsels and remembered them, than thought of her on one day of the year.

The Empress wrote also to Mercy, saying she had carried out his wishes in despatching de Breteuil; she had given him a list of the personages at Court of whom he was to take note, which included, besides the Royal family, the Prince de Ligne, and the Comtes de Broglie, Noailles, Châtelet, Esterhazy, and Rohan; de Breteuil gave proof of possessing more frankness than diplomacy for "he appeared interested in Madame Polignac, telling me she was a pretty woman, so I soon cut that short." The Empress charged him with many gracious messages for de Choiseul; and, restrained from giving him any confidence about Marie Antoinette, warned him against the Comte d'Artois and de Rohan's insinuating ways. "Contemptible as he is, he knows how to please by suppleness and by sycophancy carried to a point that does not even resent an insult to his character. . . . He can amuse, and there you have what is the greatest merit in this century." 31 October, 1776.

The chief interest in this letter of Marie Thérèse is an allusion, in a separate enclosure, to the Young Pretender, Charles Edward, who, with his wife, Princess Louise of Stolberg, was living in Florence to

the great annoyance of the Empress' son Leopold, and of his wife, who was Grand Duchess of Tuscany and daughter of Charles III. of Spain. Leopold (afterwards Emperor) had written : " Neither I nor my wife can ever have any peace or quiet in Florence as long as the Pretender and his wife and the Marquis de Barbantane (who is the French ambassador, and a schemer as the others are) remain in it. These persons positively have taken a dislike to me and to my wife ; they abuse us openly and try upon every occasion to annoy us and cause unpleasantness. The " *Prétendante* " is pretty, coquettish, and very prepossessing [she was then twenty-four]. So she gives dinners and takes all possible trouble to attract people to her house ; she gains all visitors to the town who are not English, and also many people of this country. There they criticise everything. . . . All the gossip of the town comes from that house ; all the scandal about the people we see or visit. By this means they undermine all the society and company we try to form. . . . They try to give to all strangers the very worst impressions of this country. . . . They cast discredit on our Government . . . and make strangers believe it. I have been patient for a long time, but the trouble is always increasing and is becoming a public scandal ; and as long as these persons are in Florence we shall never know peace or quiet." And he goes on to beg that Mercy may be requested to use his influence to get de Barbantane recalled.

The Young Pretender was no longer young when

he was so actively irritating Marie Antoinette's brother; he was fifty-six years old, and, as the Count of Albany, had grown harsh, and soured, and drunken; while the "prepossessing" young wife, the Countess of Albany, had elastic views upon her marriage vows.

Marie Antoinette's correspondence grows curter. It is but a very short letter in which she mentions that she is going the next day, with the King, to the races. These took place on the 13th, and were modelled upon English lines as far as such was possible. English dress, "*fracs*," instead of the magnificent Court dress, "*rédingotes*," more English in cut than in name; English horses, English jockeys, (imported from London), English cabriolets, instead of the ancient coaches, English two-wheeled carts called "*diables*," in which the Queen drove herself; English bets of large amount, and nothing un-English but the temper of the losers. The Comte d'Artois kept a racing-stable, imported English horses (one "King Pepin," a reputed marvel); but nevertheless was beaten by the Duc de Chartres.

12 November, 1776.

Mercy adds many details of these races for which he feels unutterable disgust. French vices hitherto had, at least, the glamour of most perfect courtesy; there might be no righteous man in all France, but there was always manner; and a gentleman would ruin himself, his neighbour, or his neighbour's wife, with a delicate grace. But now "swindlery and blackguardism have stretched hands

15 November, 1776.

across the Channel and saluted mutually"; and Mercy describes the salutation.

"The horse-races were very deplorable events, and, I even dare to say it, unseemly as the Queen was present. I went to the first race-day on horse-back; and I took great care to keep in the crowd at some distance from the Queen's pavilion, into which all the young men entered, booted and "*en chenille*" [riding dress]. In the evening the Queen, who had perceived me, asked me, while at play, why I did not come up into her pavilion at the races. I answered, loudly enough to be heard by the many feather-pates present, that the reason I had not come was that I was in riding boots and dress; and that I had never been accustomed to imagine one could appear before the Queen in such attire. Her Majesty smiled, and the culprits glanced very angrily at me.

"On the second race-day I went in a carriage and wearing town-dress. I went up into the pavilion, where I found a great table spread with a simple collation, which was being positively pillaged by a mob of young men improperly dressed (*indignement vêtus*), making such a clamour and a noise, that one could not hear oneself speak. And in the midst of this crowd were the Queen, 'Madame,' Madame d'Artois, Madame Elizabeth, 'Monsieur,' and the Comte d'Artois, the last-named running up and down stairs, betting, in despair when he lost, abandoning himself to pitiful exultation when he won, flinging himself into the crowd of people to cheer his postillions or

'*jaquets*,' and presenting to the Queen those who had won a race for him.

"My heart was full of bitterness at seeing this spectacle, even more so at seeing the constrained and bored looks of 'Monsieur' and 'Madame,' of Madame d'Artois and Madame Elizabeth. I must confess that, even in the midst of this hurly-burly, the Queen bore herself well, speaking to every one, but maintaining an air of grace and dignity which partly diminished the indecorum of the moment; but the public, who cannot perceive this '*nuance*,' will only see a familiarity, dangerous enough if merely suspected in such a country as this."

He describes the surroundings. The racecourse about a league and a half from Fontainebleau, on a great heath; a wooden stand, of which the upper storey was a large room, encircled by a gallery, where the Queen and her suite watched the races. Men arrived at this *rendezvous* on horseback, "for the most part dressed in a *négligé* scarcely decent;" but every one was permitted to go up to the room where the Queen remained. They made their bets there, and "they were never arranged without many arguments, and much noise and tumult." The Comte d'Artois risked very considerable sums, and was much annoyed to lose, "which he nearly always does."

At one of these race-meetings the Comte d'Artois worked himself into a passion, and treated both the Duc de Chartres and the Marquis de Conflans very badly, saying to them he was "sick of being continually

cheated, both at the races and at cards." This accusation made a great sensation, and "it is not the first instance of the kind, due to the violent character of this young Prince." Mercy notes his "disordered ideas of Anglo-mania," his adoption of the English fashions of topboots and "*rédingotes*," for his hunt livery, his "trying to imitate the appearance, dress, and tastes of this nation, which in a son of France is very displeasing"; and he approves the idea of Marie Antoinette to abolish horse-racing, and institute instead feats of horsemanship, such as riding at the ring, etc., as being "more national and not merely a bad copy."

There were many English at the Court now to set that copy, amongst them a bold determined youth, FitzGerald, who backed himself to ride over some high railings, and did it so well that the Queen was entertained. This was sufficient; the feat must be outhazarded or FitzGerald would retain too proud a preeminence. It was suggested that a more daring leap would be one over the back of a standing horse; the Queen, struck with the danger, wished to prevent it, but the Comte d'Artois insisted so hotly that the Englishman took up the challenge. The horse was placed, the leap attempted; and down came both horses and the rider in such a fall that it was "only by luck he escaped with a few bruises."

To Mercy this sort of adventure was highly objectionable, for, taking place under the eyes of the Queen, it appeared as if with her approval.

The inner Court arrangements were no more satisfactory. Not once in 1776 did the diplomatic little suppers, with the King and the Court, take place; which Mercy regrets the more as they were the sole occasions upon which the King accustomed himself to converse. The suppers in the private rooms deteriorated till they became merely the opportunity of a few favourites; all persons above a certain age were excluded, although their rank entitled them to consideration. The very worst impression was caused by the nightly passing of the Queen through the antechambers filled with people, without ceremony, without suite, and with the arm of her favourite, the Comtesse de Polignac, linked in hers.

The time has gone when Mesdames, in specially donned hoops of formal state, cloaks, and embroidered robes, preceded by guards, lackeys, and equerries, accompanied by their own Court, passed through these same antechambers, in the mediæval glare of carried torches, on their way each night to the King's reception.

Against etiquette, and its barriers fencing off familiarity whose issue is contempt, the Queen waged incessant war. No longer was she followed wherever she moved by two Ladies-in-Waiting, in full Court robes, and several *valets de chambre*; no longer did a Duchess, as Lady of Honour, have to kneel, with a napkin over her arm, to change her plate at dinner, or pour out the glass of water (the Queen's only drink), while four noble Ladies-in-Waiting, in full Court robes, hoops, and

trains, handed the dishes. The Queen, as the centre of a shouting, arguing, disrespectful mob of young men, betting at the races; the Queen, playing billiards in the great room of the château, with a "whirlpool of youth" around her; the Queen, sitting at the head of her table, gambling, round her hovering all the fribbles of the Court, chattering to her Majesty incessantly, while personages the most considered in the kingdom stand respectfully outside the circle and never have a word addressed to them—these are the pictures of 1776.

On the subject of play, Mercy has many revelations. It has become a mania; and all at Court gamble day and night, the King detests it, yet yields permission by a "complaisance that resembles submission." The Queen desired to play faro in her own rooms (the taste for which she had acquired in the nightly gambling in Madame de Guéménée's apartments); and she asked the King to give permission for the men who kept the faro banks of Paris to come to Versailles. Louis said that even the Princes of the Blood were forbidden to play it; and that it would be setting the worst example to permit it at Court. But, with his usual docility, he gave in, granting permission "for one occasion only."

The "*banquiers*" arrived on 30 October, and faro was played all that night, all the day of 31 October, and all that night also, a continuous sitting of thirty-six hours.

"The most deplorable point," says Mercy, "was that

1 November was All Saints' Day; and therefore the Queen, who did not cease play until three o'clock in the morning, was gambling on a solemn saint's day, to the scandal of the public. . . . The Queen extricated herself from this difficulty by a jest, saying to the King that he had given permission 'for one occasion,' without limiting its length; so she had been quite justified in extending the sitting for thirty-six hours . . . to which the King said, laughing, 'You are a good-for-nothing, although worth so much.' . . . 'Monsieur' and 'Madame' went twice to this faro, but did not stay late; the Comte d'Artois remained there until seven or eight o'clock in the morning."

The Court was filled with gamblers, not always honest; persons were admitted whose only claim was skill at cards; "rascals pure and simple, swindlers, any one could be present at the Queen's play if he had a decent coat. . . . The room was a vast octagon, ending in a cupola with balconies, where women who had not been presented could easily obtain permission to remain and watch the sight." The Duc de Lauzun tells us that only Duchesses had the right to take places at the Queen's table for lansquenet or faro; but that other players stood behind these ladies and gave them gold and notes to stake. And as any rich people of Paris or great gamblers were permitted to join, they hastened thither in crowds, without etiquette, without ceremony, and "*en polisson*." Rascality (in decent coats) was rife, stories multiplied: the robbery was attributed to the nobles of Comte Arthur Dillon's

pocket-book, stuffed with banknotes ; counterfeit louis in *rouleaux* were attributed to the ladies. The Queen lost or gained 500 louis [£480] a night, as a matter of course ; she won 7,000 louis [£6,720] one evening at Marly, the same evening that the Comtesse d'Artois lost 25,000 écus [£3,000] and "Madame" 50,000 écus [£6,000] ; the Duc de Chartres lost 30,000 louis [£28,800] at Fontainebleau, and M. de Chalabre 42,000 louis [£40,320], but the last-named seigneur made up this loss by winning 1,800,000 livres in one night [£72,000].

Mercy preserves the accounts of the two faro nights. When the Queen stopped play at four o'clock in the morning she had lost 90 louis [£86 8*s*.], but the second night she lost only a few louis. "Monsieur," playing against his will, lost 400 louis [£384], but in spite of that, the bankers lost 1,200 louis [£1,152].

Mercy writes that one of the chief resulting evils of these dissipations is that the King is left alone all night, which causes comment. He says that these continued excitements prevent his having any moment to speak seriously to the Queen ; but that he is convinced her good qualities will prevail when this whirl of dissipation passes.

He says the Prince de Ligne is much in favour, even with the King, who carries his docility to the point of accepting persons whom he dislikes, if Marie Antoinette distinguishes them ; and that the Prince has been given permission to wear the hunt uniform of Choisy, and also the dress ordained for that palace.

The French Court had attached honour to these privileges from the time of the shrewd Roi Soleil; who bound his nobles to his service with *galons* of silver and of gold, and rewarded merit with a *just-au-corps* of turquoise blue lined with red. Each palace, too, had its regulation coats—blue for Choisy, green for Compiègne, red and gold for Trianon—and in the day of little things it was more mortifying for a courtier to wear the wrong coat than to be unable to pay for his wardrobe; and he would rather carry the King's candlestick at his Majesty's inelegant "*coucher*" than govern a province.

The honour of carrying the candlestick was highly prized, and with reason. The bearer remained until the last courtier had been greeted by Louis, and had left the bedroom; thus he had the opportunity of demanding some favour, unheard by the others, and usually granted hastily by the sleepy King, whose sole anxiety was to get rid of every one, and go to bed at ten o'clock. But the candlestick-bearer had to be a man of great facial control, or he would lose his chance; by a frown if his earrings were pulled, (as was done to the Prince de Ligne), or a smile at his Majesty, wrapped in a dressing-gown, shuffling round the circle of his Court in hasty farewells, too hurried to disentangle his Royal ankles from the breeches he dragged behind him on the floor.

The last letter of Mercy this year refers to the insufferably fatuous Duc de Lauzun, whose memoirs are interesting only in so far as they do not refer

to himself—a small residuum. De Lauzun had imagined he could gain more influence with Marie Antoinette by destroying that of Madame de Polignac. He therefore concocted stories of the Comtesse having shown the Queen's letters; and of the Comte de Vergennes and the Minister Sartines having received bribes from England. Marie Antoinette, upon the advice of Mercy, received him and told him she would give him every opportunity to lay his proofs before the King; the Duc de Lauzun, embarrassed by this simple course, "had the audacity to say he could see she had been taking some one's advice," and could not bring a single paper or a proof. This further increased the discredit into which the Duc de Lauzun had fallen, by his vague schemes of making the Comte d'Artois King of Poland, the blatant ineptitude of which had made him the laughing stock of the ministers whom now he wished to injure.

18 December, 1776.

Mercy is taking all measures for the approaching visit of the Emperor Joseph to Paris, the Emperor being determined to preserve such rigid *incognito* that he will not sleep even one night at Versailles, or at the Petit Trianon, or in any place connected with the Court or with the Princes in any way; and he has asked Mercy to engage a couple of rooms for him. "I will be lodged at my own expense," he stipulates, somewhere in Paris.

He ends by telling the Empress that Marie Antoinette has requested him to go to all the best

shops of Paris to find something suitable for a Christmas present for her mother ; and that he had suggested she had better select something from the Sèvres porcelain manufactory.

CHAPTER VII

The Emperor Joseph's Plans—Marie Antoinette's Debts—Louis Pays Them—The Prince de Ligne—Carnival—Balls at the Palais-Royal—De Rohan and the Grand Almoner—Abbé Georgel and the Forged Letters—The Races at Sablons—The Queen's Favourites—Lauzun and the *Lettres d'État*—Gambling at Versailles

THE first letter written in 1777 was from Marie Thérèse to the Queen, announcing as a New Year's joy the approaching visit to Marie Antoinette of her brother. The visit did not become a fact until 18 April; but for more than a year previously the Emperor had been making resolutions and unmaking them; wishing to see his sister, not wishing to take on himself the onus of visiting her, lest the reunion prove disappointing. To the experienced Empress the little attempts of her son to hold her responsible, by some unguarded word or sign of desire, for this projected visit, were quite obvious; and she mentions many times in her letters to Mercy that she has penetrated their reason. If the Emperor found his stay in France pleasant, all the credit of the original idea would be his; if unpleasant, a scapegoat must be provided, and Marie Thérèse

was resolute it should not be she. In pursuance of this pose of reluctant but filial acquiescence, Joseph II. had written to Marie Antoinette: "You know, my dear sister, how much I long to see you again. It is true that my presence here is quite futile; I am only the fifth wheel of the coach. Nevertheless, being charged with the fulfilment of certain duties that concern the service of my Sovereign, I am not sufficiently my own master to make my own plans."

Marie Thérèse (to whom Mercy had sent this detail) observes, with maternal indifference to this palpable pose, that she has heard the fifth-wheel-of-the-coach phrase before; "it is his usual remark in the company he frequents." And she gives no impetus to the plan by opposition.

Joseph, therefore, arranges and disarranges; keeps Mercy on the watch for an immediate visit, and then postpones everything for a few months. While Marie Antoinette, torn between her desire to see her brother and let him see her as "my Queen, my charming Queen" (of Marie Thérèse's letters); to show herself a beautiful, fascinating, graceful woman, instead of a little, thin, unformed child of fourteen, and her dread lest all her charm should fail to divert the inevitable scoldings; is not sure whether pleasure at the prospect, or relief at the postponement, lies uppermost.

Marie Thérèse writes: "In a month you will see the Emperor, an interesting epoch for you. You know his kind heart and also his sagacity; from the former you have everything to expect; 2 January, 1777.

from the latter everything to gain. I hope that you will confide in him frankly. . . . I hope that he will commend himself to the King ; and when the first embarrassment is past, that they will be friends." It was just this first shock at the sight of his brother-in-law that Marie Antoinette dreaded—the first personal contact with the poor, feeble-brained King, who now must stand alone before the keen, contemptuous eyes of the Emperor Joseph, unpropped by dictated letters or supplied decisions, a physical and mental incapable.

Marie Thérèse wrote the next day to Mercy, asking him to send her the Emperor's plan of route, for which she will not ask him herself, lest she be suspected of a desire to modify it. Also to limit his correspondence to the sending of ostensible despatches *only*, during the Emperor's stay in France, lest he imagine that his actions are being too closely watched ; but to keep a diary of everything, and furnish her with it after he has left. As to the resolution, that refused to be indebted to his sister for a lodging, she can only hope it will wilt upon arrival. " I trust, at least, he will not have a hired carriage, but will accept one of yours, without your livery ; and that he will not insist upon dining in his hired apartments."

3 January, 1777.

She hopes little of practical value from the visit : " One of two things will happen—either my daughter will win the Emperor by her charming ways ; or he will irritate her by trying to teach her too much. I

think the former the more probable, as she is so pretty and attractive, with wit and sparkle in her conversation . . . he will be flattered—and he loves to shine."

Still concerned with the visit of the Emperor, Mercy writes that he is endeavouring to carry out his Majesty's commands. The Queen has been much hurt that her brother will accept no hospitality from her. She said that people would be surprised; but "I will sacrifice all my desires to please him, he shall live and lodge just as he wishes." So Mercy takes a little house near the château, and furnishes it with every necessary, the furniture carefully selected as being "*les moins recherchés possibles.*" And further to carry out his Majesty's instructions he arranges that the Emperor shall slip into the Palace by little back ways, to avoid meeting any one; and go up a private staircase to the Queen's room, as Joseph had written to Mercy he declined to "take part in any comedy" of greeting. 17 January, 1777.

Marie Antoinette's conscience is giving her the liveliest inconvenience. Debts, bets, gambling, Palace abuses, dissipation, her waste of time, her choice of favourites, all rise before her in turn, menacing her with threats of Joseph's reprimands. She cannot change suddenly—it would appear too obviously due to fear—nor is she desirous of yielding all her pleasures in deference to the opinions of one who is, after all, only her brother Joseph. Besides, she is not only a Queen now, but the prettiest Queen in Europe, and is accus-

tomed to sway the opinions of men ; and the fourteen years' seniority of Joseph loses weight now that she can command, or dismiss, at will, the most venerable ministers of the Crown. But, in spite of her reasons, qualms return, and Mercy says that she is growing more and more uneasy as to the probable remarks of the Emperor ; and has even commenced to confide these apprehensions to her favourites. Mercy points out that nothing would so shock the august brother as the discovery that she had made such confidences ; and he obtained from her a promise that she would do so no more.

He writes about her debts, as he had found the Queen one day in a state of anxiety and embarrassment ; for she had suddenly realised that she was heavily in debt, that she had no idea of the total sum and no prospect of paying it. Mercy went into the accounts and found that the debts amounted to 20,303 louis [£19,490]. "The Queen, a little surprised at finding her finances so much disorganised, felt how greatly she would be pinched in her current expenses ; and she resolved (although with reluctance) to sound the King, and discover whether he would be disposed to take a portion of these debts upon himself. At the first words that the Queen uttered upon the subject, the King consented to pay the whole sum, without hesitation and with the best grace possible. He only asked a few months' delay, as he wished to pay this debt from his privy purse, without the intervention of any minister."

As Mercy observes, no similar instance is recorded

in the whole of the previous reign. "The day after the promise the King himself brought 2,000 louis [£1,520] to the Queen; at the end of December he gave 25,000 livres [£1,000]. In the course of February 100,000 écus [£12,000] will have been paid off, and the remainder will be before the end of April. This conduct of the King is the more remarkable as he is naturally extremely economical, particularly with money actually in hand; and I found the Queen in the utmost surprise at such prompt and easy compliance when she had least expected it."

To Mercy the Queen confessed not only her surprise at the generosity of Louis, but her self-reproach that she asked all and gave nothing; that he yielded his preferences in everything to her wishes, but she never consulted his tastes; with which Mercy cordially concurred, telling her she had ample grounds for self-reproach, "and she agreed, quite frankly."

The objections, raised by Mercy, with justice, against the majority of the Queen's circle, bear fruit in the prospect of her brother's criticism. Mercy congratulates himself that he has succeeded in unmasking the Duc de Lauzun, "one of the most dangerous personages," and that he has lessened the "pernicious" influence of the Princesse de Guéménée; but the Comte d'Esterhazy is still in favour, as is the Duc de Coigny; and the Prince de Ligne has even asked permission to be present when the Emperor comes, of which request Mercy entirely disapproves. Marie Thérèse, in her letter of 31 January, says that

there is a method of preventing the visit of the Prince de Ligne by a general proclamation to all Flemish subjects, forbidding them to come to Paris during the Emperor's visit, that he should not be incommoded during his short stay.

This Prince de Ligne, so prominent a figure in the history of Belgium, was connected, on his mother's side, with the English family of Oglethorpe, and also with the match-making Madame de Brionne, whose endeavours to obtain prudent matrimonial alliances for her son and daughter were her chief occupation in life. The Prince was, in himself, a proof of his own aphorism that "reputations almost always dèpend upon those who have none."

The Carnival season this year had not been brilliant.

Paris, 15 February, 1777. The ladies of Paris were tired of driving the distance to Versailles to find the Queen always with the same favourites and only paying attention to them: and the ladies of her Court, were not prepared to exercise hospitality. The Princesse de Lamballe could not entertain, from lack of wit; the Princesse de Chimay would not, from lack of money; and the Comtesse de Mailly, from lack of room. So the ladies came to Versailles, as Mercy sympathetically relates, had to remain in full Court dress till ten or half-past; and then to go back at night to seek their suppers in Paris. And as all this ordeal did not result in any privileges, such as the little suppers "*des cabinets*" of the Queen, or similar distinctions, they ceased to come at all.

Not for long had Versailles been so deserted as this winter; and the dearth of dancing ladies so seriously vexed Marie Antoinette, that she had gone more frequently than before to the masked balls at the Opera, always accompanied to them, however, either by "Monsieur," "Madame," or by the Comte and Comtesse d'Artois. The two Savoy sisters will not go together, so they alternate in accompanying the Queen, who has a lady of the Court in addition, and an officer of the Guards, who follows, masked, and at a distance of a few paces. Sometimes the Queen will walk about the ball-room, but always with an escort of some men of rank and distinction. "Her Majesty has paid this honour to several strangers, particularly to the Duke of Dorset [he was Earl of Middlesex until he succeeded his father as second Duke in 1765], an English noble whom the Queen treats with special favour. There are always many strangers of this nation here; and as they have more taste for and skill in dancing than any of the others, and as they become, in consequence, the leaders at these balls, they have received many distinctive marks of preference."

The favour shown to the English strangers made the "patriots" murmur, says Mercy, and declare the Queen had a special leaning towards the English; but the jealousy ended with the balls that had given it occasion.

The last weeks of the Carnival were a record of dissipation. On 30 January the Queen went to a

ball given by the Duc de Chartres at the Palais-Royal; she arrived at midnight, accompanied by the four usual members of the Royal family, but without the King. She danced much, and did not leave upon her return to Versailles till six in the morning. Within a week she went to a second ball, still more brilliant; and stayed, dancing till six o'clock in the morning, in that same Palais-Royal, which, placarded "National Property" in huge tri-coloured letters, was shown as a last insult to "*Egalité*" d'Orléans, on his way—powdered and in a coat with velvet collar—to the guillotine.

And on Sunday, the next day, the Queen went to the Opera ball, and stayed till daybreak; on Monday there was a ball at Versailles, at which the King was goaded to appear; on Tuesday, a ball in the Queen's apartments, after that a supper, and after supper another ball at the Opera until six in the morning.

Thus ended the Carnival, "and the Queen confessed to me that after all she had been very little amused."

While Marie Antoinette is bored by her balls, Mercy sees, but cannot guard against, a great evil—that of de Rohan, the bane of the Queen. Dismissed from Vienna, afraid to appear at Versailles, de Rohan had no other occupation than intrigue; and was well aided in this by the embittered and vindictive Comtesse de Marsan, who never forgave Marie Antoinette the recall of her nephew. The opportunity of schemes had come, that the appointment of

Grand Almoner might become his, on the death of the Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon. He was now so nearly a dead man, that, tired of merely waiting for his shoes, de Rohan was actively engaged in trying them on. Grand Almoner Roche-Aymon first comes into view at the signing of the Act of Marriage of the Dauphin and Marie Antoinette, his little, tight, niggled signature, without capitals, "antoine delarocheaymon," following directly after those of father and son d'Orléans. Next the Cardinal is seen, regretfully assisting at the banishment of his hope—Madame du Barry; and announcing unctuously, after the dying confession of Louis XV.'s half-century of sin, that his Majesty regrets that he may have given subject of scandal, but he has now made his "apology to God." He seems now really dying, after having misled the world by many vain hopes of dissolution; and de Rohan and his relatives are already claiming the dead man's shoes.

This intelligent anticipation of events is so usual in France, that the "*survivance*" of an office is always openly asked for and bestowed, that the lifted foot need not wait, but take its measures betimes.

Before Louis XV.'s death, when de la Roche- Aymon, though old, was still full of life, the intrigues for the reversion of the Grand-Almonership began, in favour of de Rohan, who (now forty-three years of age; he was born in 1734), was supported by all the Soubise, Guéménée, and Marsan strength. Louis XV. signed the promise of this "*survivance*," and Louis XVI.

confirmed the signature. But Marie Antoinette, full of indignation at de Rohan's insolence to her mother, had made Louis give her his "word of honour," that de Rohan should never be Grand-Almoner. When de la Roche-Aymon's last flicker seemed imminent, the Comtesse de Marsan bestirred herself, with her signed promise in hand, only to find things changed and the King repudiating the signatures.

Mercy says: "Suspicion fell at once upon the Queen. The Rohan family put itself into a prodigious pet; they sought, and found, means of gaining the Comte de Maurepas [who veered as the wind blew]. The Duc de Choiseul [mortal enemy of Coadjutor de Rohan] roused himself; and brought all his engines of intrigue into play to deepen the cut at his foe, and the most envenomed feud broke out."

19 February, 1777.

Suspicions being thus directed against the Queen, the Prince de Soubise, as head of the Rohans, wrote a letter to her by the medium of the Princesse de Guéménée, her favourite, and his relative. Marie Antoinette, embarrassed, had to reply, and did so in a manner that gave a half denial of opposition. Then the Comtesse de Marsan had an interview with Louis, and "used language of such force that the young monarch was afraid of her." Finally he gave in, terrified by her tongue, saying that de Rohan should have the place, only with the written condition that he quitted it at the end of a year. The Comtesse de Marsan, knowing well that possession, in such cases,



LOUIS RENÉ ÉDOUARD CARDINAL DE ROHAN.

From an engraving by Voyé le Jeune.

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was more than the nine proverbial points, yielded to this show of authority and retired; and Louis ran instantly to tell the Queen what he had done.

In the meantime the Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon recovered.

In reporting all this affair to the Empress, Mercy says that he considers the appointment of de Rohan would be a very great evil, very ominous for the Queen; that Marie Antoinette cannot endure this man and, though she treats him severely, does not overawe him, but rather exasperates him to more intrigues. "This *cabal* is the most dangerous at Court. All means are alike to them if they promote their ends; and they have fit tools to carry them out—for instance, this Abbé Georgel, who, to my knowledge, has been employed to forge letters and to spread false reports among the public."

Mercy here plainly hints at the origin of the many letters purporting to have been written by Marie Thérèse, of which de Rohan had already made such base use in Vienna. His dread for the future of Marie Antoinette, founded on his knowledge of these two men, was justified; and it was de Rohan and Georgel, the disgraced smuggler-prelate and the unscrupulous forger, that the French nation believed against the fair name of Marie Antoinette.

March comes, but the Emperor does not, and the Court life continues without change, except that the balls have ceased, as it is now Lent; but the racing and play are more marked than before. 18 March, 1777.

The racecourse at Sablons, beyond the Bois de Boulogne, is the scene of interest. "There have been four races of English horses, and the Queen has been to see them all. They had built a wooden pavilion similar to that at Fontainebleau; they prepared a luncheon, and men came there, all very carelessly dressed, and there ensued an uproar and a tumult most indecorous in the presence of the Court. . . . The Comte d'Artois, the promoter of these race meetings, ought to feel discouraged by his failures. In spite of his large expenditure upon horses and English jockeys, he never wins a single bet, and every one permits himself to makes jokes upon the fact, which irritates him greatly." The fact of the proximity of the plain of Sablons to Paris added to Mercy's horror; for to the racecourse flocked the majority of the inhabitants of Paris, drawn thither by curiosity, who occupied their time afterwards in making remarks, "either true or false, on what they believed they had seen."

Even when Marie Antoinette returned early to Versailles, there was no cessation of dissipation, for play commenced each night in her rooms, where they played for such high stakes that many people had been driven away for fear of heavy losses; and their absence contrasted sharply with the overflowing Court before the gambling mania had fallen upon the few. Mercy has nothing to note in the inner relationships at Court but the varying degrees of influence that the favourites obtain over the Queen, and "each abuses, in a greater or less degree according to

the demands of her own interests." The Comtesse de Polignac maintains a superiority over the others, and her power increases daily, while that of the Princesse de Lamballe diminishes. But that soft, charming "nullity under a childish air" was philosophical. She had tried all the resources of weeping and jealousy, of fainting and the vapours, "she gave herself many torments and quite futile troubles," says Mercy, "and now she begins to contemplate more tranquilly the advantages of her rival." She combined a shrewd business capacity with this tranquillity; and recouped her loss of favour by an increase of favours, for she asked and obtained endless little concessions for herself and her family. Especially did she abuse her privileges in military matters, and with regiments at the disposal of the Queen (all regulations notwithstanding) there were few relatives or friends for whom a commission was not forthcoming. "There is not one single person among all those who surround the Queen, who tries, in true zeal, to be of service to her Majesty. I have often told her Majesty so with the frankness she permits."

The Princesse de Guéménée was, as the Duc de Lauzun said of her, "a very singular person, with much *esprit*, which she uses to plunge into the most mad follies." If she had heard this description (written to his mistress, Madame de Coigny) she might not have been so warm a supporter of the Duc. Mercy tells of a curious favour she had asked from the Queen on behalf of Lauzun—that the Queen

should give him one of the *lettres a'État* to save him from arrest for debt. These letters were nominally for the protection of those acting in the direct service of the King; they were granted by his Majesty and countersigned by the Secretary of State, and their object was to protect from a debtors' prison (for which nearly every distinguished personage was eligible) any one despatched on a special commission of the King. They were not so usual an article of commerce as the *lettres de cachet*, which, being at the disposal of the Duc de la Vrillière, who was himself at the disposal of the Irish lady, "La Sabatin," afterwards the Marquise de Langeac, were kept by her in printed stocks, and sold for 25 louis each. Thus, for the trifle of £24, any one could consign an enemy to sudden and eternal disappearance; and trade was brisk in Paris.

The boon for the spendthrift de Lauzun was not granted, owing to Mercy's instant unveiling of motives. The Duc de Lauzun had inherited a large fortune from his mother, the Duchesse de Gontaut (sister of and co-heiress with the Duchesse de Choiseul), and another from his wife, the only child and heiress of the Duc de Boufflers; but, as Mercy writes, "at the age of twenty-six years he has devoured the capital that brought him in 100,000 écus annual income [£12,000], and he is now pursued by his creditors for about two millions of debts [£80,000]." To the great indignation of the Duc de Lauzun (who had announced in his ineffable memoirs that he intended to rule France and Russia by the

sway he had over the affections of both Queen and Empress), the trifling boon of immunity from arrest for such trifles as tradesmen's bills was denied.

Another demand, this time made to Louis, is from Madame Louise of the Carmelites, who, finding that the young King had given a pension of 200,000 livres [£8,000] to each of the other aunts, asked for an equal income to be bestowed upon her. But this claim from "the Papal engine," as Walpole calls the aunt in the Carmelites, was considered by the austere Louis as a breach of her vow of perpetual poverty; and he did not even answer it, discontinuing also his visits to the convent. As for Mesdames de France, they now ceased from troubling, and remained quietly in their own apartments; but "Madame Adélaïde, and especially Madame Sophie, do not love the Queen; Madame Victoire preserves more friendliness."

The gambling of the Queen grows more and more unrestrained. The public know that the identical games, strictly prohibited to them by the laws of Paris, are played nightly and to excess by the Queen. Since the Court gave the example, all laws, therefore, had been disregarded and gambling carried on without constraint or limit. During the winter that had just passed there had been such heavy losses from gambling, such numberless acts of rascality, and so many rogueries, that the Government had been obliged to renew all the old enactments with added severity.

"The Queen showed some ill-humour to the King about this, who, with his usual docility and gentleness,

hardly dared to confess the prohibitions that he had been obliged to sign; but the Queen does not bother herself in the least; they play faro in her rooms nearly every night. . . . The Comte d'Artois has the fury of gambling upon him, and torments every one to give to a sort of collection he has made in Versailles, which will form a bank when it has reached five or six hundred louis [£576], against which they will gamble heavily. The Queen loses considerably and almost daily. . . . The sums that the King destines to the paying of the Queen's debts, and which he brings to her week by week—these sums, I say, are, in part at least, swallowed up by the daily losses at play; and the Queen will find herself in the double embarrassment of seeing her debts increasing at the same time that she is taking advantage of the goodness of the King. It seems to me that your Majesty would do well to give the most serious advice on the subject of gambling; but your Majesty must not appear to know anything about the debts paid by the King, or I shall be compromised, as the secret was confided to me."

CHAPTER VIII

Cahuette de Villers and the Forged Letters—A Successful Fraud—Medical Science in France—The Doctors of Paris—Comparison between Marie Antoinette and her Husband—Arrival of the Emperor Joseph II. in Paris—Mercy's Illness—The Admiration of Joseph—His Interview with the King—His Opinions of King and Queen—His Examination into the State of France—He explores the Past, the Present, and the Future

THE anticipation of the Emperor's visit to Paris dwarfed everything else in the correspondence between Mercy and the Empress; but the Ambassador finds place to mention the scandalous intrigue of a lady known as Cahuet, or Cahuette, de Villers, who had dared to borrow money in the name of the Queen and for that purpose had employed the weapon (so fatal in after years) of forged letters purporting to be from Marie Antoinette. Mercy had discovered the swindle, laid his complaint before the Minister of Paris, and had caused "*la dite* de Villers" to be arrested and conveyed to the Bastille: within whose overwhelming walls she had been induced to confess a portion of her knaveries upon arrival and the remainder after a few days. Madame de Villers was a lady of irregular conduct, who carried her

commercial spirit into *all* the relations of life. She had two main ambitions—one the hope of being suspected of an intrigue at Court, the other the determination to bring this flattering suspicion to money value—and being an ingenious and inventive person, she was successful in both. Her husband was judiciously selected—he was in the Treasury. Her lover was even better chosen—he was Superintendent of the Finances of Marie Antoinette. But he was only adopted after a failure to win the notice of Louis XV.; and after a little comedy of well-calculated errors, including an unappreciated *hôtel garni* at Versailles.

The reputation of a Royal intrigue, however, was as sound a commercial asset as an actual connection; and on the strength of one quite imaginary Madame de Villers succeeded in borrowing large sums of money from many dupes, until the death of Louis put an end to this convenient fiction. But the inventive lady had other resources.

The imaginary intrigue was followed by a real one with Gabriel de St. Charles, whose position in the household of Marie Antoinette was extremely useful to her. She first endeavoured to approach the Queen by means of the Princesse de Lamballe, whom she induced to convey to Marie Antoinette a portrait she had painted of the Queen. This was considered by her Majesty to be so bad that it was rejected and no interview granted; but the genuineness of the acquaintance was of small consequence. She commenced to write letters to herself imitating Marie Antoinette's

hand, commissioning her to buy jewels, etc. She found in St. Charles' rooms an account-book with the Queen's arms upon the binding, and with these as her ostensible proofs, she carried on business in good style for many months.

Mercy bemoans "the facility with which any one can play on the credulity of this country." Though Madame de Villers had never been actually in the presence of Marie Antoinette, the numerous little notes that she showed, as from the Queen, in strictest confidence to many friends, obtained so great a success that on the strength of them she ordered what she chose from the Paris shops—jewels and "*objets de fantaisie*"—deceiving the vendors without the least difficulty. 16 April, 1777.

Encouraged by the limitless field of gulls, she flew at bigger game, borrowed (for the Queen) 100,000 livres [£4,000] from a banker named Lafosse, and then demanded 100,000 écus [£12,000] from Bérenger, the treasurer of the Duc d'Orléans, saying in a letter (from the Queen) that she needed the money, but did not like to ask the King for it. Bérenger, overjoyed at this opportunity of rendering a service, handed the money to Madame de Villers; and then (rather late in the proceedings) made some inquiries, which exploded the whole farce.

Mercy says: "The researches into the secret practices of this woman have brought to light many intrigues in which very distinguished personages are mixed, which would be made public if the trial of this criminal

were carried on in the ordinary courts. As nothing could come out which was not to the honour of the Queen, I proposed to her Majesty to insist on justice taking its ordinary course ; but the ministers of the King objected, and preferred that investigation and trial of this affair should be reserved for a special commission. The Comte de Maurepas was particularly strong upon this point ; probably because he knows his nephew, the Duc d'Aiguillon, is too deeply involved in the machinations of this de Villers, who had a great hand in the rise of Madame du Barry. If this criminal were judged according to the laws of the land she could be condemned to the gallows ; but she will probably be sent to a house of correction for life."

The next instance of intrigue was upon a subject concerning which all French people pretended knowledge. Walpole wrote, in his very plain-spoken Paris letters : " There is not a man or woman here who does not talk gruel and anatomy with equal fluency and ignorance." The fluency of which he speaks was so marvellous that it never ceased, the minutest details of illness were discussed at crowded supper-tables with a copiousness and a coarseness of speech absolutely horrifying to Walpole when heard from the lips of the most distinguished ladies of the Court. " I thought we were fallen," said he, " but they are ten times lower ; " and the " filthy stream in which everything is washed without being cleaned," the incredible dirt and foul habits of the Court ladies and gentlemen, the amazing indecency, are all described with the shudder

of a wholesome soul. As an example of their medical remedies, Walpole's own experience may be given. He had an attack of gout when in Paris; and Madame de Bonzols recommended him an infallible gout cure—to preserve the parings of his nails in a bottle closely stoppered.

Madame de Bonzols was the daughter of Maréchal Berwick, sister of the Duc de Fitz-James, and therefore granddaughter of James II.; and her knowledge was on a par with that of other Court ladies. But the French ladies possessed at least the desire of investigation in their medical studies. Madame de Coigny had in its extreme the passion for anatomy to which Walpole refers. We are told by the Duc de Lauzun—who ought to have known—that she never travelled without a corpse packed into the body of the carriage.

Walpole tells an anecdote of the Duchess of Douglas which shows that this eccentric coach habit was not entirely French. Walpole was driving to Paris from Amiens, when he met the Duchess returning to London. One of her servants had died in Paris, so she had tied the body in front of her chaise. She had taken the precaution of having it embalmed first; but "it is a droll way of being chief mourner," said Walpole.

This universal interest in medicine made the appointment of a new doctor to Louis XVI. almost one of personal feeling to everybody at Court. When the King ascended the throne, his own doctor,

Lieutaud, became by right his senior physician. But Lieutaud was failing, he was seventy-four years old; and it was proposed that Marie Antoinette's doctor, Lassone, should take the place of Lieutaud, as he had a certain hereditary claim to the appointment, his father having been doctor to Louis XV., and he himself having attended Marie Leczinska. The immediate thought of all at Court was to provide a doctor for Marie Antoinette; and amongst others a Doctor Bordeu was suggested, a "man of some reputation in his profession, but well known as an intriguer of the first degree," says Mercy. The Queen permitted herself to be hurried into a decision, before Mercy knew what was going on; and Bordeu would have gained the appointment but for his sudden death, just as it was arranged.

His medical *confrère*, Bouvard, said of him, on hearing the news of his decease: "I never should have thought he would have died a *horizontal* death!"

Barthez was another doctor of the same time. He had not the advertisement of attending the marvellously healthy Madame du Barry, as had Bordeu; but he compelled from the reluctant Bouvard the appreciation that "he is witty and knows many things—and even a little medicine."

It will be seen that there was no great choice in French medical advisers and Mercy's suggestion that Lassone might as well be Chief Physician to both their Majesties, was finally appreciated and carried out. Mercy's reason for the appointment was chiefly

that "Lassone is a straight man, and attached to the Queen." His qualifications do not enter into consideration.

Mercy, in his secret report to the Empress, expresses his deep appreciation of her gratitude for his ceaseless care of Marie Antoinette: "It is the most precious of my duties . . . and I am personally so much attached to the Queen that nothing is a burden to me that concerns her glory or her happiness. This noble Princess, who is so attractive by her individual character and wit, would be beyond reproach if they would only leave her to herself. It is against her unworthy surroundings that one must guard her; and I will fight them till my last moment with the same stubbornness I have always shown. . . .

"On Saturday I was nearly two hours with the Queen; and in that time I discovered how much these mischief-makers had worked to fill her mind with fears and suspicions of the Emperor, and to take from her all confidence in him. The Queen, accustomed to show me the inmost thoughts of her soul, repeated to me remarks that so stirred me that, regardless of prudence, I made one of the fiercest attacks I have ever dared against the favourites, whom I characterised one after the other . . . omitting no point nor subtlety. The Queen was greatly moved, and my audience ended in a way that greatly eased my mind, her Majesty saying: 'I see how much you are attached to me. You have always proved it to me, and I feel it deeply.'"

The growing dread of her brother's sharp reproofs, inspired by conscience and increased by intriguers, had led Marie Antoinette into contemplating the idea of deceiving him on the subjects of her gambling, the influence of her favourites, and the advantage which they took of her affection. Mercy says that he intends to explain all clearly to the Emperor, and to lay stress on the chief evil—her carelessness, which was permitting a certain estrangement between Marie Antoinette and her husband, by failing to take every opportunity of being in his society, and by neglecting to ensure that he sought no other society in consequence of her absence. Mercy mentions the various attempts at Court to throw temptation in the way of Louis, particularly by the charms of an actress at the Comédie Française; and adds that, although these attempts had not been, and, he was convinced, never would be, of the slightest effect, yet the Queen should be on her guard and he should tell the Emperor of the true position of affairs.

That Marie Antoinette should not avail herself of every opportunity of being in the society of her husband causes little wonder when one realises what that society implied, for Walpole describes both husband and wife as they were about this time, when he was writing to the Countess of Ossory. He had been told that he would be astonished and subjugated by Marie Antoinette; and the brilliant Englishman, accustomed to judge of the value of Court praises, made his journey to Paris in sceptical spirit. His

enchantment has been often quoted in French memoirs, for he went to see the Court and he saw nothing but Marie Antoinette. "It was impossible to see anything but the Queen. Hebes and Floras and Helens and Graces are street-walkers to her. She is a statue of beauty when standing or sitting; grace itself when she moves. She was dressed in silver, scattered over with laurier-roses; few diamonds, and feathers much lower than the Monument. They say she does not dance in time, but then, it is wrong to dance in time. . . ."

In Louis he traces a curious Stuart resemblance in the heavy face: "If you only saw how like this King is to one [of King Charles's breed] and what horrid grimaces he makes, I am sure all my power of description would not reconcile you to him."

The daily life and desires of King and Queen grow ever more widely opposed. The Queen, alive in every nerve of her body, every thought of her mind, in vivid health, untiring, brilliant, emotional, to whom the day and night are too short for all her interests, witty, sweet-natured, proud, and sovereign; the King, dull, plodding, ignorant, stolid, half-alive, imperfectly conscious, undeveloped in body and in mind, toiling at his little mechanical duties of kingship, as he does at his forge, with a great desire to do his poor best, so seldom speaking that his disused voice squeaks with the effort, with the loud, meaningless laugh and "horrid grimaces" and loutish tricks of the imbecile, yet with gentle, docile nature that submits meekly to the inevitable impulses from stronger wills. He

lives a life by routine ; she, by caprice. He is bent by every force ; she resents even the shadow of domination. He took his kingdom with "*Quel fardeau pour moi !*" and she took hers with "admiration of the arrangements of Providence that has chosen me for the most beautiful kingdom of Europe !"

The great event of the Emperor's visit took place on 18 April ; and on 7 May Mercy writes, ill and distracted, for he has been seized with an illness that prevents any prospect of accompanying his Majesty, although he is treating it by the only method apparently known to Paris doctors—he is being bled continuously. But it was not till ten days after the arrival of Joseph II. in Paris that Mercy was well enough to attend the "Comte de Falckenstein," who, in spite of all resolutions and hiring of furnished apartments, stayed during part of his visit to Paris in Mercy's mansion at the Petit Luxembourg.

7 May, 1777.

The arrival of Joseph II. was as informal as he wished. He came into Mercy's room at half-past seven one evening, stayed with him awhile, as he was in great suffering, then had his supper and visited him again, staying from nine till half-past ten, during which time Mercy detailed everything that he would be likely to encounter.

The arrival at Versailles was equally informal. The Emperor left the Petit Luxembourg at a quarter-past eight the morning after his arrival in Paris, attended only by the Comte de

19 April, 1777.



JOSEPH II., EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA.

(*From the portrait given by the Emperor to the Comte de Mercy Argenteau.*)

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Belgiojoso, and was at Versailles at half-past nine. The Abbé de Vermond, instructed by Mercy, was in waiting; and the Emperor alone, leaving even the one attendant below, slipped up the secret stair, and not a soul saw him come. He came into Marie Antoinette's room, where she, eager and timid, was waiting for him; and for two hours the brother and sister were alone in the privacy so desired by both for their first meeting after seven years.

Afterwards Mercy heard the details of the interview, the emotion of Marie Antoinette, the amazement of Joseph at his charming sister, his confession that if she were not his sister he would certainly have married so attractive a woman; and then his insistance that if she found herself a childless widow (the prospect anticipated by all) she must come back to Vienna to be with him. Marie Antoinette's fear fled; the dreaded Joseph was her friend and brother, and she told him her whole heartful of the troubles of years—the strange position in which she was, a wife and no wife, her habits, her gambling, her dissipations, her favourites—everything, frankly and fully. Joseph, to whom a lecture was too dear to miss, yet softened it so gently that there was no lessening of trust.

Then came the interview with Louis, for which his sister's talk had now prepared Joseph. "The Queen led him into the King's room; the two monarchs embraced; the King made some remarks that showed a real desire to appear cordial and polite; the Emperor noticed the desire and was content with

that; with his ready wit and gracious manners, he knew how to put the King at ease from the first moment. The Queen then took her august brother to the apartments of the Princes and Princesses."

The anger of Joseph at the dissipations of his sister had melted away before her charm; it turned now to pity for her fate. When, with further knowledge of Louis, he found out what was worthy under the poor feeble brain and physique, he wrote thoughtfully of both: "Her situation with the King is singular. . . . This man is weak-minded, but not an idiot. He has some ideas and some judgment, but his apathy of body and of mind are equal. He can hold a rational conversation; he has neither desire for instruction nor any curiosity—in short, '*Fiat lux*' has not yet been spoken."

Of Marie Antoinette he wrote in this same month of May 1777: "She is perfectly virtuous; she is even austere, by character more even than by judgment. . . . She is a sweet-natured and straightforward woman, rather young, rather thoughtless, but with a basis of uprightness and honesty truly wonderful in her situation. In addition, she has wit and a power of just penetration which often astonished me."

In that first busy day Joseph called upon the Comte de Maurepas, and paid the "Scoundrel-et" so many compliments that the light and aged minister told every one, in confidence, "with extraordinary satisfaction"; then upon the Comte de Vergennes "who had learnt diplomacy in the seraglio when minister to Turkey,"

then upon the Comptroller-General and the Prince de Montbarey; then he dined with the King and Queen, and returned in the evening to tell Mercy all that had happened.

On the 21st the Emperor had a conversation of over two hours with the King, even discussing affairs of State: "He found the King was not absolutely devoid of knowledge (*absolument dépourvu de connaissances*), that he appeared to hold to his own ideas more by obstinacy than by rational conviction, but that he seemed to have a tendency to wish to do well." These phrases of Mercy, rounded for the Empress's eye, yet smack of the vigorous descriptions that Joseph must have given when he told Mercy each night his impressions of the day. He had supper in the apartments of "Madame;" and afterwards the King, "Monsieur," and the Comte d'Artois had been so much at their ease in his presence, that they amused themselves by "*des enfantillages*," running up and down the room, and flinging themselves upon sofas, "till the Queen and the Princesses were embarrassed by reason of the presence of the Emperor, who, ignoring these incongruities, continued to talk to the Princesses . . . and did not permit himself to make any remark on his surprise at so strange a spectacle."

There were dinners at the Trianon which served as text for little lectures; and a visit to the Opera, where the Emperor wished to remain hidden in the back of the Queen's box, but Marie Antoinette drew her brother forward by the arm and placed him in

the front of the box, the action causing storms of applause. Wherever he went he strove to hide; but was always discovered, and followed by crowds. His popularity upon arrival was unbounded; he went everywhere, saw everything, spoke to every one, and won admiration from all, even from the severe Madame Adélaïde, who called him into her rooms upon pretext of showing some interesting portraits, "and being alone with him, she embraced the Emperor, saying 'this mark of friendship should at least be permitted to an old aunt.'"

This touching sentiment, recorded by Mercy, loses in value when we remember that the difference of age between the aunt and the Emperor was one of only nine years, Madame Adélaïde being at this time forty-five, and the twice-widowed Joseph II. a man of thirty-six.

Joseph's visit was one of instruction, to give and to receive; and in pursuance of his own programme he worked diligently. He made the most exhaustive examination into the finances of France and the expenditure of the Court, aided by the knowledge of Laborde, formerly Court Banker; and he took copious notes of all matters of interest. He went with Mercy to examine into all details concerning the internal communication of France; he studied maps, inspected models of bridges, etc., and surprised every one by his grasp of the subject. He explored the dusty, forgotten picture galleries; he visited the hospital called La Salpétrière, the prison of Bicêtre,

that great failure, the "*Colisée*," which had cost 2,700,000 francs [£108,000] the previous year; and the famous Gobelins' manufactory to see the Royal tapestries. He inspected the Royal printing works, which owed much to the taste and patronage of Marie Antoinette, for this was the only form of art in which the Queen took interest; he visited the Savonnerie to see the Royal carpets made; he went to the Veterinary School, to Mass, and to the Deaf and Dumb Institution. Madame du Deffand said of him: "He has been everywhere; he wishes to see the past, present, and future; one cannot find out which epoch he prefers." There was nothing in Paris and its neighbourhood that escaped his restless investigations; and he saw everywhere the network of this vast, unwieldy apparatus of Royalty—its wasteful, extravagant manufacture of inutilities, its riot of abuses, its imposing shams, its superb magnificence of State supported upon a system of finance that his own examinations had shown to be rotten, its luxury that laid the world under tribute, its dirt that reeked with disease, and its squalor that turned the galleries of Versailles and Fontainebleau, even the landings of the grand staircases, into common haunts of street hawkers.

CHAPTER IX

The Emperor Joseph's Opinions of his Relations—Of the Favourites—He Soothes the Princes of the Blood—Buffon and his Book—He visits the Comtesse du Barry and the Works at Marly—The Duchesse de Bourbon—The Royal Stables—Joseph II. Lectures upon Thrift—He makes Slighting Allusions in Public to the Queen—His Domineering Ways—His Dislike of "English" Fashions—*Coiffures* and *Rouge*—The Emperor leaves Paris—Mortification of de Choiseul, de Rohan, and Voltaire—The Emperor's Provincial Tour and that of the "Sons of France."

THE personal links between the Emperor Joseph and his sister's Court are of more interest than the sights of Paris. After the first warm outburst of affection came the cooler attitude of criticism. Joseph observed sharply, and rebuked with acerbity, choosing rather to humiliate than to lead; and Marie Antoinette, resenting the attacks upon her dignity, made by reproaches addressed to her in the presence of her attendants, was not predisposed toward acknowledgment of her faults. The Emperor was taken to the races; he found all the noise, tumult, and betting, the familiarity, and the indecorous luncheon as Mercy had described. He went, at his sister's

request, to spend an evening in the apartments of her favourite, the Princesse de Guéménée; there the bad style and general licence of the guests shocked him, and the frenzied gambling at faro, ending in loud accusations of cheating flung by her guests against Madame de Guéménée, seemed to him such insolent familiarity that he left the room, saying to the Queen it was nothing but a common gambling-house. For "Monsieur" he had an instant aversion (although he admitted that "this unaccountable being, of mortal coldness" had more intelligence than the King); and M. de Provence in return disliked him cordially, and said that Joseph imagined he possessed penetration, but in reality he was so greedy for flattery that he let himself be penetrated. The Comte d'Artois he dismissed as "the complete coxcomb"; "Madame," he said, "is not Piedmontese for nothing; she is full of intrigue"; and the Comtesse d'Artois "is an absolute imbecile."

With such sentiments towards his relatives, Joseph's family life became rather strained. He had another interview with the King; who summoned courage enough to say that he wished he had some children, and to make some vague remarks upon the interior government of France, to which the Emperor listened, not wishing to embarrass him. With a little more encouragement, Louis was induced to confide his love of his wife and his admiration for her grace and charm; and, further, to give some rational opinions upon things in general, to the confessed amazement of the Emperor,

who told Mercy that he had thought even such efforts were far beyond the mental capacity of the King.

The favourites met with no greater appreciation. The Emperor took a marked dislike to the Princesse de Lamballe and showed it plainly; he treated the Comtesse de Polignac with more outward respect, but laid traps for her in conversation, leading it into channels in which the Comtesse was lost and betrayed her want of wit; Madame de Guéménée he detested cordially, and spoke so plainly to the Queen about the impropriety of her behaviour, which was not limited to indecorum in gambling only ("*elle ne se singularisait pas dans sa societé par une vertu qui n'était point de mise*"), that the interview became stormy (*un peu orageuse*) and Mercy implored the Emperor not to hold the reins too tightly. Many visits were paid with the intention of obliterating the memory of his brother Maximilian's want of tact. The irritable pride of the Princes of the Blood was soothed by the "Comte de Falckenstein" calling upon the Duc de Chartres and spending some time in the gardens of the Palais-Royal; and paying another visit to the Duchesse de Chartres, an attention to their relative that won the hearts of both Orléans and Penthièvre families. The Choiseul party was conciliated by a visit to the Duchesse de Praslin, described by Walpole as "jolly, red-faced, looking very vulgar, and being very attentive and civil." The Duc de Praslin (cousin of the Duc de Choiseul), "important and empty," served Walpole as a text upon which to write of the

pomp and poverty of the Court: "His footmen are powdered from the break of day, but wait on their master with a red pocket handkerchief tied round their necks." Both de Praslin and de Choiseul had suffered in the reign of Madame du Barry, who hated both frankly, and heralded their downfall by crying: "*Saute Choiseul! saute Praslin!*" as she tossed oranges in the air after supper "to divert King Solomon."

Another judicious visit of the Emperor's was to the Botanical Gardens to see M. de Buffon; and Joseph gave a sequel to the story of his brother's bad manners by saying to the renowned author whose books had been rejected by Maximilian: "I have come to seek the work that my brother forgot to bring."

The visit to the Comtesse du Barry was not regarded as so diplomatic; although its ostensible reason was an overwhelming desire to study the celebrated hydraulic machine at Marly, which is close to Louveciennes. The visit to the machine was regulated by a previous inquiry as to the possibility of finding Madame du Barry at home; and that lady naturally took an unpremeditated walk in the direction of the hydraulic machine whose mechanism is said to have groaned so loudly that it was very disturbing to the rest of dwellers in the neighbourhood. Joseph II. went on foot upon this scientific expedition, met the so celebrated lady, confessed great admiration—of the Pavilion; and remained in it, talking to the owner for two hours. He then admired the gardens: the Comtesse proposed to show them: the Emperor offered her his arm: she modestly

declared herself unworthy of such an honour ; and he replied : " Raise no objections on that score. Beauty is always Queen." His private opinion, given after the inspection of the works at Marly, was that she was not so beautiful as he had expected to find, but he was very glad to have seen *la belle recluse*.

A visit of curiosity as well as conciliation was paid to the Duchesse de Bourbon, the latter pleasing the Prince de Condé, the former satisfying the Emperor as to the personality of one of the most calumniated personages in Court history, if a portion only of the anecdotes concerning her were true. Among the minor points of interest connected with her was her taste for music, and many musical parties (where the Duc de Guines played the flute and the Comtesse Amélie de Boufflers the harp, and other musicians showed their skill) are referred to in the Court records as having been given in the magnificent palace in the faubourg St. Honoré. The Duchesse escaped the guillotine, by some strange chance ; and on the fall of the monarchy she was escorted to Marseilles by two hundred soldiers, lodged for three months in a cell as if she were a criminal, and all her fortune seized. But her reputation, or lack of it, must have served her with the Revolutionaries for she was the only bearer of a great (if not a good) name who was permitted to escape ; and a mob that murdered the harmless Princesse de Lamballe for the crime of being sister-in-law to an Orléans, allowed the Duchesse de Bourbon to live, philosophically nursing the sick in Spain, and declaring

she was not to be pitied, "above all as they had left her her stable." The Comte d'Allonville gives this anecdote, and says the "stable" consisted of one single ass!

The Emperor Joseph had many opportunities of counting the number of horses in the Royal stables, for he was taken over the great establishments of the King, then over those of the Queen (which alone included about three hundred horses). He was then asked if he would like to see those of "Monsieur;" and he demanded in his amazement whether among these hundreds already seen there were not enough for him to use. But not only had "Monsieur" his own great stables, but they were distinct from those set apart for the use of "Madame"; there was then the still greater establishment (including the racing stables) of the Comte d'Artois; and even Mesdames had their own stables and kept their own pack of hounds (with master, the Marquis de Dampierre), called the *chiens verts* from the colour of the hunt uniform. The only member of the Royal family who had not her own separate stables was Madame Elizabeth, the young sister of Louis XVI., who being only thirteen years of age was not considered old enough to have her full establishment. The Emperor cried out: "In Vienna my mother has forty horses!"

The pleasure with which Marie Antoinette showed her brother these proofs of her regal magnificence was damped by his utilising each for subject of fresh lectures. He reproached her for the enormous waste

that such ostentation implied, after a visit to these stables; he blamed both her and the King for their ignorance of their own art treasures, after he had gone through the empty and unfashionable picture galleries; he pointed out the extravagance that marked the household administration, and in this there were really immense abuses. For instance, there were two First Women of the Bedchamber, their salary was 12,000 livres [£480]; but as they had the right to take each day all the candles in the bedroom, the cabinets, and the gambling-room, this perquisite alone amounted to 50,000 livres [£2,000]. The candles of Mesdames meant an income of 215,000 francs [£8,600] to some one, and Madame Elizabeth was supposed to devour 70,000 francs' worth [£2,800] of meat and 30,000 francs [£1,200] of fish, which attributes an expensive appetite for £4,000 worth of two items only of food to a child of thirteen.

Joseph's remarks upon all these matters were tinged with much indiscreet sincerity; and he did not limit his expressions to the audience whom they were supposed to benefit. Great indignation was felt, not only by Marie Antoinette, but by her Court, at one instance of the Emperor's too ready tongue. The Queen had written to her brother to meet her at the Italian Theatre; but changed her mind and sent a messenger to the Italian Theatre, asking him to come on to the Français where she was waiting. The Emperor left the Italian Theatre; but observed to Clairval, the actor, "Your young Queen is very

thoughtless, but, fortunately, you French do not mind that." As Clairval had been a barber's boy, and as his scandalous life was well known, it was felt that the Emperor in passing a public stricture upon the Queen might have better selected his auditor. Marie Antoinette confided to Mercy that she had great regard for her brother's opinion, but she wished that he would not adopt so severe a form of administering them; she had been wishing for some trifle, when Joseph interrupted saying that if he had been her husband she would have known better than to suggest such things.

Another time Marie Antoinette had supported Joseph's own suggestion that Louis should travel, should visit his chief provincial towns, should go especially to Brest. She had expressed her intention of accompanying her husband on these travels; and Joseph said that she should not go, as she was "no good to him in any way." He continued in the severest manner to reprove her for her "too unceremonious manner towards her husband"; he spoke of her language to him as being "insufficiently respectful," and said she showed "lack of submission." These remarks actually horrified the Queen, as they were made to her in the presence of the Comtesse de Polignac and the Duc de Coigny; and they were followed by the stern order to her to go and seek the King in his apartment. As if this manner of addressing the Queen of France were insufficiently irritating, Joseph added a deliberate slight later in

the evening. After supper the Queen proposed to go and walk on the terraces; and the King and "Monsieur" prepared to accompany her. Joseph, seeing this, sneered at their complaisance and announced that he, at least, had no intention of going out with her.

The words of Marie Antoinette to Mercy, that if her brother were to stay much longer there would be undoubtedly "frequent and great disputes," were heartfelt. All her cherished frivolities were held up to be demolished, and Joseph, this time backed up by the King, made a fierce onslaught on the taste that preferred everything English in ways and in fashions, pointing his remarks by the English standard of manners as seen—at the races. The resemblance of these modes to their English models may be gauged from the instance of the vast dinner given in Paris to the Duchess of Bedford by the Maréchale de Villars, who desired that everything should be perfectly English in honour of her guest. In the middle of the dessert she called out: "Lord, they have forgot! yet I bespoke them. You English love hot rolls—bring the rolls!" And a huge dish of hot rolls was handed, with a sauce-boat of melted butter!

The *coiffures*, those indexes of the taste of the moment, were also reflections of what the French Court took to be English fashions; ladies afflicted with "*Anglomanie*" carried upon their plastered heads an entire racecourse, with horses, jockeys, dogs, and a few five-barred gates, the mixture of racing and hunting

being, of course, typically British. Perhaps Joseph's animadversions upon the madness of head-dresses were caused by the special visit before-mentioned to the Duchesse de Chartres, who, in a Court that calculated its *coiffures* by the yard, made it her ambition to outdo the most enterprising; and she would almost certainly be arrayed in the most advanced of her modes for an Imperial visit. The memory of the Duchesse de Chartres is enshrined in one monstrous *coiffure* that she designed with the aid of Léonard. Fourteen yards of gauze covered the scaffolding of a tower upon her head, designed by the architect to exceed by two inches the height of the "*coiffure à loge d'opéra*" worn by the Queen. From the summit of the tower waved feathers; and upon the building were two waxen figures, representing her son, the Duc de Valois (afterwards Louis Philippe), in the arms of his nurse. Besides these there were a black boy, a parrot, a plate of cherries, and (worked in their own hair) the initials of her husband, Duc de Chartres, of her father, Duc de Penthièvre, and of her father-in-law, Duc d'Orléans. This erection was called "*le pouf sentimental.*" It is interesting to remember that its creator, Léonard, the Court *coiffeur*, died in the enjoyment of the appointment of Inspector-General of *Funerals*, an office bestowed upon him in answer to his application for that of director of the Opéra-Comique.

The universal habit of rouge was one to which the eyes of Joseph would never become accustomed; and Marie Antoinette had to submit to incessant

criticism upon this and every other subject connected with her dress. He used to be a constant visitor at the public toilette of the Queen, when the rouge was put on with ceremony in the presence of those who had the privilege of entry. Upon one occasion Joseph called out: "Put on some more, under the eyes, *mettez du rouge en furie comme Madame*!" pointing to a lady who was present. These remarks did not tend to make Joseph popular within the Court; nor did his air of universal instructor upon all points connected with the government, to which the King listened in perfect silence, "giving no sign that he understood what was said."

Mercy says that time will show if the visit of the Emperor has had any effect upon the mental condition of the King. "We cannot assume that the mind of the King is sufficiently developed to render him capable either of deep esteem or strong friendship; these sentiments require more sensitive feeling, more reasoning power, and more reflection than we can attribute to the King; but to judge by appearances he has felt as much liking for the Emperor as his capacity admits, and we cannot say more than that."

The French public were enchanted with the simple, familiar ways of the Emperor, and proved it by such demonstrations of exuberant homage that Joseph showed his disgust in his face. He told Madame du Deffand that he was surprised at their surprise: 'It is natural to be a man, not natural to be a King." And he mingled with the crowd that thronged to

see their Majesties eat their meals in public on Sundays, saying he had so often played the game himself that it was amusing to look on at the comedy.

The day came for Joseph's departure; and grief on each side was solaced by gifts. The Emperor presented a snuff-box, with his portrait set in diamonds, to Mercy, and a diamond-set box to the Comte d'Angivillers, who was the Director of Buildings; he gave a hundred louis [£96] to the Gobelins and the Savonnerie, and half that amount to the Sèvres porcelain works; and he distributed diamond rings to such as had served him. Madame Campan declares that he gave no present to any one in the household; but as he had preserved his dignity by the little *hôtel garni* in the Rue Tournon, instead of staying at Versailles (he forebore to lodge at the bath-keeper's, as he had threatened), he doubtless felt disinclined to pay that tax. Louis presented him with some of the finest tapestries from the Gobelins, several carpets from the Savonnerie, and a service of Sèvres porcelain, the value of the whole amounting to 200,000 livres [£8000]. It is not stated what Joseph gave in return. Marie Antoinette's present to her brother was a watch whose only ornament was her own portrait. She had at first the intention to give a watch-chain also, formed of her own hair; but she decided that this little idea would not please the Emperor (would probably be classed with the *pouf sentimental*), and the chain was not made. The last hours that Joseph spent with his

30 May, 1777.

sister were employed by him in improving converse; he went through all the points in her conduct that he disliked, and gave her a written (and somewhat verbose) statement of his ideas upon her future behaviour, both as wife and as Queen. He embraced the King and commended his sister into his care, saying that he should never know ease of mind until he was assured she was happy. Louis managed to reply that this was his own desire. Marie Antoinette, filled with deep grief now that the time of parting had come, with difficulty commanded her emotion, and said good-bye very tenderly; and Joseph left Versailles at eleven at night, quitting Paris soon after five o'clock the next morning.

The counsels of Joseph, aided by his departure, had immediate effect. Marie Antoinette did not make a single excursion to Paris, nor did she gamble once for eight days.

The Empress heard with joy of the good feeling between brother and sister. She did not hear from Mercy more than mere hints of his errors of judgment; and she hastened to write to Marie Antoinette an extract from Joseph's letter to her: "I have left Versailles with grief and with real affection for my sister. I found there a sweetness in life which I had thought I had renounced, but for which I still find I have the desire. She is amiable and she is charming; I have spent hours upon hours with her without observing how they flew. Her feeling at my departure was deep, her

Schlosshof, 29 June, 1777.

self-command great; it needed all my strength to tear myself away." Marie Thérèse begs that her daughter will send her portraits, "that I may see the face and the carriage, that I do not know, but all the world much admires. Having known my dear daughter so small and such a child, the desire to know her as she is now will excuse my importunity." She asks for two portraits, one small that she may have in her own cabinet, one large "for the hall where all the family portraits hang; and shall this charming Queen not be amongst them?"

If the arrival of Joseph had given solace to many affronted personages, his departure left three in bitterest mortification. These were the Duc de Choiseul, ex-Ambassador de Rohan, and Voltaire. Of these possibly de Rohan was the least affected: presuming on the favour shown him in Vienna, he wrote to the Emperor to ask permission to pay his Court; but he did not take into account that Joseph, posing as the upright mentor of pleasure-seeking youth, was not the Joseph who listened so greedily to his scandalous stories that he overlooked the disgrace that de Rohan was to the Church, and his insolence to his mother and Sovereign. The Emperor took no notice of the letter of his former ally, in sympathy with whom he had degraded himself by public mockery at the Ambassador of France who replaced him. The case of Voltaire and of the Duc de Choiseul were more deplorable; for each had made vast preparations for the anticipated visit. The Duc de Choiseul relied

on the services he had rendered to Austria, the alliance between that country and France, and the marriage of Marie Antoinette. He came to Paris and was received by Joseph in a short, rather cool interview in the ante-chamber of his apartments ; and the Emperor, who ostentatiously avoided him afterwards, rewarded his services by congratulating Louis that he was rid of "this restless and turbulent minister," and by leaving Chanteloup far out of his line of route through the provinces. Voltaire's suffering was due to wounded vanity : he had expected to have a philosopher-Emperor at his feet ; he, the correspondent of Kings, anticipated that devouring curiosity would draw Joseph to Ferney, and he found himself merely overlooked, although he had taken the precaution to send two friends to meet Joseph and to point out the road to Ferney.

The Emperor travelled through France, writing to the King and Queen from Brest and Rochefort ; but wherever he went it was in the same spirit of inquiry and absence of ceremony, refusing all entertainment, paying his way and giving himself incredible labour to acquire knowledge in every place. At the same time "Monsieur" and the Comte d'Artois were travelling through the French provinces in considerable state, with immense expense and a great retinue of servants. They disorganised all the post service, put the provinces to great cost, and returned with the only results of their travel plainly visible— "Monsieur as fat as a barrel" and the Comte d'Artois increased surprisingly. Joseph, who termed himself

"an adroit charlatan," knew well how to take advantage of the comparison between the Emperor of Austria, busy, learned and learning, silent and doubtless profound: and the "sons of France," the sly, sleek, elder brother plotting everywhere to ingratiate himself at the expense and to the detriment of the King, and the debauched, wild, insolent, younger brother who finished the ruin of his reputation by his excesses on this tour.

Of the two, Joseph speaks more hotly of "Monsieur," saying: "I like the King, and if needs be I will fight for him; and unless M. de Maurepas has no more spirit than a baked apple, I cannot conceive his enduring such things." This letter had been sent by the ordinary post, and probably therefore had been read, as Mercy believes.

Toulon, 3 July, 1777.

Joseph's tour through the French provinces showed him another side of the national character—diligent, laborious, widely opposed to that shown at Court; though the result of his investigations at all the chief ports was a growing distrust of the French navy. He said that the whole marine did not inspire the least confidence, as ships and handling were alike bad, and as to their seamanship he need only refer to the continual accidents that befell all their shipping. He mentioned that he had been to the Garonne, "where were two or three hundred sail. There is great trade here, for it serves as the seaport of the American islands, and of the American rebels, of whose shipping I saw a dozen vessels."

This was the first allusion by Joseph II. to any sign of interest in the American war, a subject that in later times became so attractive to him that he declared his intention of going to America to study the war there. Marie Antoinette, with all her sympathy for the Americans, said: "I hope he will think twice before going to a country the declared enemy of all sovereigns. . . . The last outbreak has made me tremble and given me much subject of thought." Her instinct warned her of the danger of ideas of liberty and independence to her own undisciplined and ferocious people, unused to self-government. Silas Deane and Benjamin Franklin were in Paris, sent as envoys to the French, to solicit their help and support.

CHAPTER X

A Fleeting Reform—Faro Resumed—The Duc de Fronsac—The Duc de Richelieu's Three Marriages —Music on the Terrace at Versailles—Joseph's False Move, and its Failure—His six Reprimands —His Instructions Thrown into the Fire—The Queen's Revolt from his Control—The Frenzy of Gambling—The Defection of Abbé de Vermond—Marie Antoinette and her Husband—She wearies of her Life—The Comte d'Artois and Bagatelle—Meudon

THE reforms at Court lasted for three months, with diminishing virtue. For the first month after the departure of Joseph, Marie Antoinette obeyed the rules laid down for her by the Emperor—no visits to Paris, no gambling—instead, a simple life in her own Petit Trianon, with the company of two or three ladies, more attention to the King, and an hour and a half daily devoted to solid reading.

Mercy mentions to the Empress, with pride, that the Queen is studying Hume's "History of England," and has already advanced a long way through the book. But he does not allude to the fact that Marie Antoinette had been reading this history for four and a half years, and had plumed herself upon her broadminded study of

Paris, 15 July, 1777.

the work of "a Protestant" as long ago as January 1773. She profited by Joseph's verbose admonitions, given in writing as a permanent guide, sought the King's society daily, and remained with him an hour or two each afternoon. This virtuous existence coincided with the absence of the Comte d'Artois, who was expensively undermining his constitution in the provinces.

The first step back into the old routine was the concession to herself that play might be permitted if it were merely in her own private apartments; but faro was as great a danger in her own rooms as elsewhere, and Mercy saw with apprehension that the little private gambling meant the loss of large sums. The players were objectionable, for the institution of a faro bank involved the acceptance of the Marquis d'Ossun and the Duc de Fronsac as "*banquiers*." The Duc de Fronsac, son of the Maréchal de Richelieu, had every vice of his father without his one redeeming quality of politeness. The Maréchal Duc de Richelieu, who was called "*le héros de la galanterie du siècle*," had the unique distinction of being married three times, each time in the reign of a different King of France. He took to himself his first wife in the times of Louis XIV., his second in Louis XV.'s reign, and his third (at the age of eighty-four), in that of Louis XVI., this last alliance being openly undertaken as a means of annoying the Duc de Fronsac whose ruffianism had disgusted even his father.

Again every evening faro was played; the Queen lost more often than she won, the debts for the diamonds remained unpaid, and all available money was swallowed up by the gambling fever, although Marie Antoinette herself recognised its evil and also its power. The wise resolution of playing only in her own rooms did not avoid scandals or disgraceful scenes; and by September all dissipations were in as full rush as before the advent of Joseph.

Mercy describes one of these gambling evenings: "They have become tumultuous and unseemly; they give rise to altercations between those who keep the bank and those who play, to reproaches to the ladies of the Court upon their methods. . . . There was a lively scene of this sort the other night between the Duc de Fronsac and the Comtesse de Gramont [the exile in Madame du Barry's day of power]. It is impossible to hide such scandals, and they give rise to much malicious talk." The Queen was embarrassed, and thought of removing the indecorum of such scenes from her own apartments to those of Madame de Guéménée, by going there to play; which looks as if the disapproval were merely one of locality. With the desire of novelty a new amusement was adopted, "most unsuitable," says Mercy, "which, happily, must cease when the fine weather does." This was the idea of having the regimental bands of the Swiss and French guards to play on the grand terrace of the gardens at Versailles; but the wish that the people

Paris, 12 September, 1777.

should share in the pleasure led to the indiscriminate admission of crowds, some of whom were even from the village of Versailles. "In the midst of this throng the Royal family walk, without attendants and almost in disguise. Sometimes the Queen and the Princesses are together, sometimes they walk about alone, except that each takes one of her ladies by the arm." The scandals to which this simple form of entertainment gave rise in the foul minds of the time are mentioned in their memoirs; but it was not until a year or two later that the scurrilous journals dared to ascribe immorality to Marie Antoinette herself, for thus sitting or walking on the terrace with her ladies, to hear the band. The King was present upon one or two occasions, and seemed amused by the crowd; and his approval served as an additional reason for continuing this entertainment, which, as having been promoted by the Comte d'Artois, was regarded with deepest distrust by Mercy.

By October the last shadow of Joseph's domination had disappeared. Mercy writes two letters to the Empress on this date, the secret one being the more interesting, as the one for open Court use is only a "very slight sketch" of the evils now becoming rampant. He says he is perfectly astounded at the short time for which the Emperor's counsels remained valued and regarded. But he need not have felt such surprise, knowing the character of Marie Antoinette so intimately, for he had warned the Emperor solemnly and repeatedly that the

Fontainebleau, 17 October, 1777.

Queen would be led easily by affection, but would never be driven by harshness ; he had foretold the evil effect of severe reprimands from a brother, and had begged the Emperor to remember that by nothing but loving suggestions would her imperious spirit be guided. Joseph, with Marie Antoinette, persisted in the same disastrous policy that he employed towards his subjects of the Netherlands ; he initiated radical reforms, and pressed them tempestuously, regardless of deep-rooted prejudices, of character, of circumstances. Where diplomacy would have succeeded, he tried bullying ; when concession was advised, he was rigid ; domineering, narrow-minded, well-meaning, he had the arrogant certainty of his superiority that creates by intense irritation its own opposition ; and he drove both Marie Antoinette and the Netherlands into open revolt. Mercy says sadly that the Emperor had written six letters to his sister, each more severe and harsh than the preceding, and all on the subject of gambling. He says that the little loving note from her mother about the same question, deeply moved and touched the Queen, who was greatly struck by her mother's anxiety ; but to the series of six irate scoldings of her Imperial brother (which were merely repetitions, couched in the severest language, of all points he considered essential to good behaviour) she paid no attention and sent no answer. Mercy says, with deep dejection, "I have even reason to believe that the instructions drawn up by the Emperor have been torn up, and thrown into the fire ! "

Mercy has reason to write of his afflictions; the Queen has now determined to take her own course, "but what is so remarkable is her attitude towards me. Her Majesty shows me her absolute confidence; she never resents anything, no matter how strongly worded, that I say to her, she never hesitates to agree with me that my arguments are based on sound reason; but, all the same, she never takes my advice. She knows and sees that I am entirely devoted to her, but she believes at the same time that my attachment is so great that I should never take upon myself to tell your Majesty of her conduct; and this idea, which, fortunately, she has always held, maintains my credit with her, although all it permits me is that I can tell her the truth but not induce her to follow it."

He draws a picture of the life of the Queen. For the last three weeks reading has ceased, the taste for music seems to have disappeared entirely, riding has been given up, in deference to the idea that her health may possibly suffer, the chief occupation is "long and certainly very idle conversations with the chief favourite, the Comtesse de Polignac," and gambling is the one interest in life. All the time not taken up by actual play is filled with plans for it in the evening. The difficulties which this frenzy induces are manifold. "The custom of this country permits the position of banker at faro to be filled only by persons of quality. The Duc de Fronsac and the Marquis d'Ossun undertook it in order to please the Queen; but some indecorous disputes obliged them to retire. Their

place was taken by the Comte de Merle; but he is not nearly rich enough to risk the chances of a game, that by its enormous stakes might ruin him in one night. He has therefore been obliged to take partners, and the Queen has intervened to facilitate this."

To maintain the bank against which the Court played the Comte d'Artois used all manner of expedients for borrowing money from the courtiers; with the result that many persons at Court were half ruined, their families distressed, and the scandal and talk of Paris much increased. The Queen herself lost daily; she tried to hide from Mercy the extent of her losses, but he had means of ascertaining them approximately. One grievous result of the present mania was the introduction at Court of many persons, wholly unworthy of the honour, whose only claim was the reputation of bold gamesters. Amongst them is said to have been an Englishman named Smith, a man of low birth and common manners. He went to Paris with a large fortune and no reputation; published the announcement that he had brought 200,000 louis [£192,000] to lose, was instantly taken up by the Comte d'Artois and the Duc de Chartres and presented to the Queen; he played at the Court tables and speedily won 1,500,000 livres [£60,000]. The Court seemed returning to the days of the Regency, when every great noble thought it no shame to turn his family mansion into a public gambling house, for any one to enter in who would; and to place great blazing braziers before his doors as a sign

of invitation to any passer-by. Walpole computed that in Paris at least one hundred and fifty personages of high rank made their whole living in this way.

The races were commencing again, owing to the efforts of the Comte d'Artois, and with greater circumstance than ever. Mercy says: "They expect a great number of English to come over for them; and if they are like those whom we saw last autumn they certainly are not fit people to appear before a Court." The position of Mercy is rendered harder by the disloyalty of the Abbé de Vermond, who, when his presence was more than ever necessary in the hope of influencing the Queen, considered his own clerical advancement; and, declaring himself shocked at the dissipations, went to stay with the brother of the Archbisop of Toulouse for a month's holiday in Champagne. Mercy writes that this defection had been a great blow to him: "I endeavoured, but in vain, to induce the Abbé to remain, for his departure deprives me of a support very essential to the service of the Queen. I shall have to redouble my own zealous efforts to supply his place." With the greatest sweetness and grace, Marie Antoinette had tried to persuade the Abbé to remain, had made excuses for herself, had begged him to stay with her; but de Vermond could only be induced by her pleadings to promise that in the greatly desired event of her having hopes of becoming a mother he would come back.

This was the one great hope of Mercy; and to Marie Thérèse he says that this alone can win the

Queen from her present follies, into which she would never have fallen had the most ardent desire of her seven years of marriage been granted her. Her passionate love of children, her keen longing for the happiness of motherhood had been thwarted and disappointed by her childless state; and she had plunged into the wild excitement of gambling to distract her mind from her own defeated hopes. Mercy dares not build upon the chance, but yet in that vague hope lies all his trust. It is not only the present happiness of Marie Antoinette that is at stake, it is her future as Queen of France: for the mob of Paris cry aloud to her to give an heir to the throne; and the Comtesse d'Artois sees, in her ambition, her children already reigning in her stead.

In this great pre-occupation both Mercy and Marie Thérèse are absorbed; for the Empress grows old and feeble and fears that she may die without the consolation of knowing that Marie Antoinette's future is assured.

Mercy writes his constant endeavours to persuade the Queen to less repugnance towards Louis, to persuade her to seek his company, and please him and to amuse him; but he says that she has so low an opinion of the faculties of her husband, that all his persuasions cannot move her to the effort. She told Mercy her real opinion of the apathy and feebleness of Louis, saying that she kept him well in order by fear; and that she possessed so complete an ascendancy over him that it

Paris, 19 November, 1777.

was an easier, quicker, and more sure means of ruling him than boring herself to show him quite unappreciated attentions. Mercy pointed out that she could only blame herself if the hereditary pre-dispositions of the King led him astray; and she replied that she should be neither grieved nor annoyed if the King did take some passing fancy, if by that means he acquired more energy and activity. Mercy told her such indifference shocked him, and that she was underrating the capacity of the King, "but all I had to say on the subject seemed to produce no effect; still, I was heard with patience and without appearance of disgust."

But he wrote to Marie Thérèse that the Bourbons were all alike in one thing—they were slaves of any habit formed; and in the history of France the proofs of this were innumerable. Habit alone had retained Louis XV. in his chosen manner of life; and habit would exert its hereditary influence on the opposite temperament of his grandson, upon whom the natural passions never had hold.

Mercy writes that the dissipations of Fontainebleau have been incessant, and more uninterrupted than he remembered on any previous visit; but the Queen confessed to him that she had found no pleasure in it all, and had been at least as much bored as amused. She had been to some masked balls in the town, "which were remarkable only for their abundance of bad company," and to the races, which she had found dull; and even at play she had wearied of her



THE COMTE D'ARTOIS.

(From an engraving by Feschi.) [*Page* 525.

continued bad luck. The Comte d'Artois had been winning, at one time had gained nearly 50,000 écus, [£6,000], but had lost it again; and his treasurer lived always in dread of the difficulties into which his extravagant ideas and expenses constantly brought him.

One of his mad bets was that he would pull down, rebuild, and give a fête to the Queen in his house Bagatelle within six or seven weeks. Bagatelle was then a little country box in the Bois de Boulogne which had belonged, until 1758, to Mademoiselle de Charolais, of the house of Condé, the "*Frère Ange de Charolais*" of Voltaire, in allusion to her preference for the disguise of a Capuchin monk. The bet of 100,000 livres [£4,000] was won by the Comte d'Artois, the *château* demolished and rebuilt on the existing plan, completed, decorated and furnished within the appointed time. Nine hundred workmen were employed upon it, working day and night; as materials ran short and there was no time to obtain them in the usual course, the Comte d'Artois ordered out his regiment of the Swiss Guards, (of which he was Colonel), and sent patrols along every road to seize all carts with stone, lime, or other necessaries, and use them for the building. Mercy adds that they paid on the spot the value of the materials, but that did not compensate the people to whom they were consigned, and who suffered by this act of violence. Bagatelle is well known as having been the property of Lord Hertford who left it to Sir Richard Wallace; and the treasures that it once contained are now in

Hertford House, where are also some Bouchers, etc., of which the following story is told.

The private apartments of Louis XV., to which the young princes did not have access, were hung with these gems; but when Louis XVI. entered, he declined to transact business with de Maurepas until every picture had first been taken from the walls, as they affronted an artistic taste that did not rise above the colouring of maps. De Maurepas removed—and kept—the pictures, hiding them under silk hangings in his own apartments, in which they were more suitably placed, as these were the very rooms formerly occupied by Madame du Barry. At the time of the Revolution they were removed from France to Amsterdam, and finally bought for very large sums for the Wallace collection.

The expensive building hobby of the Comte d'Artois was not satisfied with the feat of Bagatelle. At the same time he was seized with the idea of repairing the Château de St.-Germain, which the King had given him; and also of restoring a great country house, known as Maisons, which he had bought in the forest of St.-Germain. The absurdity of rebuilding two *châteaux*, within a short distance of each other, was increased by the cost of the repairs which amounted to five millions [£200,000]. With so many *châteaux* under discussion it was not surprising that the Queen should desire another one of her own. Mercy heard that her Majesty had asked the King to give her Meudon, with its demesnes; and he hastened at once

to tell her how her favourites had abused her confidence. He explained that Meudon was an ancient, crumbling Royal possession that existed only because there was a governor, with a salary, to see that it was not demolished. The Superintendent of Buildings had informed the King that Meudon, already half-ruined and entirely useless, had better be pulled down. The Governor of Meudon, whose sinecure would cease with the *château*, knew that the only way to preserve both a little longer was to induce the Queen to become its owner. After pointing out this intrigue, Mercy informed her that this Royal house cost 40,000 livres [£1,600] a year to keep up; and to be made habitable would require more than 1,500,000 livres [£60,000] to be spent upon its dilapidations.

In the last month of the year Marie Antoinette resolved upon certain reforms in her play; and Mercy was thankful to chronicle the half-loaf of retrenchment. She announced that hence-forward the stakes at her table should not exceed ten louis [£9 12*s*.] on a single card. This rule was aimed at certain high gamesters, and would not affect the Court ladies, who never played so high. The second rule was that no one who was not seated at her table should play cards, or stake. This did away with the worst evil of all, the crowding gamblers standing behind the Duchesses at the Queen's table and handing them their money to put on, which gave incessant opportunities for cheating and quarrelling. December, 1777.

The only person who objected to this regulation was the Comte d'Artois, who found his methods of gambling so much hampered that Mercy was in constant dread lest the old disorder should be restored in deference to his complaints.

His consolation was that faro must soon cease at Court for lack of any one prepared to take the bank. All those who had held it at Fontainebleau had retired, and an officer named de Chalabre had undertaken it; but he could not fulfil the duties without a *croupier* to assist him, as it was not possible for one man to keep watch on the play of so many keen and unscrupulous gamblers. But although men had been found to take the bank in order to please the Queen, their complaisance did not extend as far as this; and to Mercy's joy faro actually ceased for want of a *croupier*. The Queen also, who gambled only to distract her mind, not from passionate love of cards, told Mercy that her taste for play was lessening, balls and theatres now wearied her, and she did not know how to find any fresh means of killing the tedium of her life. It had occurred to her that a fresh interest would be obtained if her brother Ferdinand and his wife could come to see her in France. Ferdinand had been ill, and when he was on a visit to Vienna his mother had written very disquietingly of his health, saying: "He is as thin as Leopold was, but looks much worse in the face, and has attacks of nerves and of indigestion every moment." Marie Antoinette sent for Mercy

and asked if this visit could not be arranged, as she longed to see her brother again, and wished also to make the acquaintance of his wife, Marie Béatrix d'Este.

Mercy's diplomatic eye saw many difficulties. He said one Archduke could be arranged, but an Archduchess, who was the daughter of a Duke of Modena, in a Royal circle where were two Piedmontese Princesses, Mesdames and their prejudices, and Princesses of the Blood with pretensions, jealousies, and ideas of precedence, presented so many snares that it would be wiser not to risk them. He reminded her of the neglected Princesse de Saxe and her fate amid the pushing Royal ladies, while apologising for mentioning her as an example of what might be the treatment of an Austrian Archduchess who tried to compare ranks with these ladies.

CHAPTER XI

The Menace from Bavaria—The Danger to Marie Thérèse—Joseph's Schemes—The Death of the Elector—Gathering Evils—Gambling at Fontainebleau—Cheating by the Court Ladies—Marie Antoinette and her Sleigh Drives—Sleighs with Golden Bells—Mademoiselle Duthé and her Coach for the Races—France prepared for War with England—The Queen and Politics—Louis' Opinion—The Methods of Mercy—Marie Antoinette plays a New Game—The Duc de Deux Ponts.

THROUGHOUT the year 1777 Bavaria had been the subject of perpetual dread to Marie Thérèse. She had hoped the menace would remain inactive during the remaining years of her life; that she might die before the inevitable blow fell. For with her statesmanlike outlook she recognised the evil was certain and inevitable in the future; but her precautions and her policy alike were nullified by the actions of her son Joseph. Bavaria had always been a danger to the Empress; from the days of her accession to the throne it had been a word of fear, summoning memories of the flight from her capital with the infant Joseph, of the advance of the Elector of Bavaria against Vienna and his proclamation as Charles VII.; of the French armies pouring into

Bavaria in support of the Elector, and of Frederick the Great of Prussia leading thirty thousand men into Silesia. Then came years of struggle for her crown and the heritage of her son, in which her only loyal subjects were the Hungarians, her only staunch allies the British troops; and her chief support the British Parliament (with its subsidy of five million pounds voted to carry on her war, and a yearly contribution from this country of £300,000, increased by Pitt to half a million in 1745), the struggle ceasing only when Charles VII. died at Munich, and the husband of Marie Thérèse, elected Emperor, became the founder of the line of Hapsburg-Lorraine.

Now, more than thirty years afterwards, she saw her dread again rise. Maximilian Joseph of Bavaria was childless and the last of the line of Wittelsbach; and upon his life hung the issues of peace or war. Joseph, to whom the cession of Silesia, as the price of peace with Frederick II., had remained a rankling memory, resolved to round the Austrian domains by the annexation of Bavaria. He considered that the alliance with France (concluded with the Duc de Choiseul by Marie Thérèse) existed for one of two purposes, either the restoration of Silesia by wresting it from the grip of Frederick, or an indemnification for its loss by the possession of Bavaria. He therefore prepared for one of those *coups* that are called in history brilliant statesmanship when they are lucky, and mad folly when they are not. He based his claims upon some fifteenth

century rights and the French alliance ; but he took the precaution of approaching the probable successor of Maximilian Joseph, who was Charles Theodore the Elector Palatine, and arranging terms for the cession of his claims. Charles Theodore was in favour of anything that saved him trouble, and at the same time gave him means to continue his extravagant life in his own lands, where his credit was already exhausted, by the endeavour to imitate in a petty little German Court the magnificently regal state of Versailles.

Joseph's horizon was limited ; he saw nothing but an easy stroke " which I flatter myself will be carried out without war." Marie Thérèse, the wise and far-seeing, knew that her ancient enemy Frederick, the " monster " as she always called him, would never permit such an aggrandisement of Austria ; she knew also that the Elector of Saxony would press his claim to the succession by right of his mother, Marie Antoinette of Bavaria.

While Joseph was stormily lecturing Marie Antoinette in Versailles, and addressing long and instructive dissertations on the whole art of government to King Louis, who received them in the silence of stupefaction, " giving no sign that he understood what they were about," Marie Thérèse was writing to Mercy her conviction that the King of Prussia had already penetrated the designs of Joseph on Bavaria and on the Black Sea, that he was certainly instilling into the minds of the French the " most odious suggestions " against them, and that it would

need all Mercy's dexterity to prevent the revival of the former jealousy of France against any increase of Austria. She had written to Mercy in July 1777: "I do not see clearly the justice of the title by which we pretend to lay claim to Bavaria; but I do see the numerous difficulties that oppose our views. I think the arrangement most profitable to the monarchy would be one of an exchange of States." Then she said that she did not suppose she should survive the Elector, for he was in good health, and young enough to be her son. With regard to the Black Sea commerce she was even more opposed to Joseph's plans, being convinced that Austria could never hope to compete with England; but the Bavarian danger was by far the more urgent, for it concerned all the chief nations of Europe. Spain would follow France, as she did before, Prussia was only hoping for a chance to seize Bohemia, England was engrossed with her American war (Burgoyne had surrendered, London was in a ferment, our whole island was dotted with camps). Thus all the interested Powers of Europe were waiting on the frontiers of Bavaria for the stroke to fall; and Maximilian Joseph died on 30 December, 1777, when the contract of Charles Theodore with Joseph was still unsigned.

Marie Thérèse sent a despatch at once to Mercy to announce the fatal event, "which I have always hoped I should not live to see"; and told him her gloomy outlook on the future. She says that the Dowager-Electress of

Vienna, 4 January, 1778.

Saxony (Marie Antoinette of Bavaria) has already lodged her claims for allodial rights—this claim amounted to 47,000,000 florins, of which 41,000,000 were subsequently disallowed—and she was so violent an intriguer that to gain them she seemed willing to throw in her lot with that of the enemies of Austria. She touched lightly upon the same subject to Marie Antoinette, in whom was all the hope of the Franco-Austrian alliance; but she wrote more fully upon the subject of pictures. There were two pictures at Vienna in which the little Archduchess Marie Antoinette figured with her brothers and sisters, which had been painted at the time of the marriage of the Emperor Joseph, when Marie Antoinette was a child of eight; she now wished to have these pictures to place in the Petit Trianon. Her mother says she will be delighted to send them, and that she will try and despatch them before eight years have passed, "the time during which I have been waiting eagerly for your promised portrait;" but she says she will not let them go until the picture of "my dear Queen" comes.

Marie Antoinette, conscience-stricken, confesses in her letter of 15 January that innumerable painters have commenced portraits of her, but they have all failed in the likeness, hence the delay. She also is interested in the Bavarian succession, for to one of her house the very name held history; and she says she heard the news of the Elector's death with a shock of uneasiness, but she hopes that a peaceful

settlement will be possible, for the idea of war would bring misery to her life.

War was, nevertheless, gathering on all sides; England and France were at such variance that the next month saw the breaking of the strained links; Austria, counting on the "very favourable" troubles of England, was already plunging into disaster; and in Paris the first cry of the mob was raised for war against Austria upon the news of the death of the Elector of Bavaria and of the designs of their idol of last year, Joseph. The Paris mob, of all mobs the most readily inflamed, had many admirations, but the life of none exceeded five weeks; and nothing burns more quickly than dead laurels.

The Queen was struck by the outcry; she had as little sympathy with the eagerness of Joseph in this matter as her mother, though her reasons were not as deeply founded. The Emperor had written to Mercy: "An army corps of twelve thousand men will march at once into Bavaria to take possession. . . . That will not give over-much pleasure where you are, but I do not see what objection they can raise"; and Marie Antoinette, in a private note to the Comtesse Jules de Polignac, said she was afraid her brother was only "playing his own hand."

As nothing, private or otherwise, escapes Mercy, he informs the Empress that he had heard this "through those channels by means of which everything reaches me;" and he had at once written to the Queen that if this indiscretion became

17 January, 1778.

known to the French ministers, there would be an end of all hope of maintaining the alliance, for they would conclude she was not in sympathy with the desires of her own Imperial house. Mercy adds that the movements of Austria are being watched with malevolence by the French ministry, and that intrigues with Prussia and the Elector-Palatine are to be expected; but that France has so many reasons to restrain herself that she is not likely to give herself over to great enterprises.

He says that the inner Court life is far from tranquil. The Queen was the first to break her own rule limiting the stakes at play, as she found the ten louis limit very insipid. She was now gambling more desperately than she had ever done before; on one evening she had lost 300 louis [£288], which the King himself paid the next morning, as he often took upon himself the payment of similar debts. Joseph had written a very sharp and short letter to her, saying that he had heard from some English strangers that when the Queen played at Fontainebleau the tables resembled a gambling-house, that nothing was to be seen but confusion and unseemly crowding of persons; that they had watched with horror the cheating of some of the Court ladies; but, he added, he should not waste his sight in writing to her as he had wasted his breath in talking to her, and he ended with wishes to the Queen for all happiness in continuing such a system of life. To which Marie Antoinette sent a very gentle little reply,

saying she had never seen and never heard of any cheating by the ladies of her Court. Mercy says significantly, however, that the accusation was justified.

Mercy remarks that the Queen now finds great difficulty in maintaining a semblance of friendship between her two favourites; he says she has grown very tired of the Princesse de Lamballe, but is increasingly fond of the Comtesse de Polignac, and to avoid the look of partiality she spends hours with Madame de Lamballe, who now bores her extremely. The Queen has again taken up her music but without much energy, and other occupation she has none. Even the sleigh driving has been more moderate, although the snow is lying attractively, out of deference to the feelings of the poor.

To the starved and perishing multitudes of Paris, freezing in the streets, the long-drawn, glittering line of Royal sleighs, painted and sparkling with gold, with gold embroidered trappings, and scarlet leather with silver ornaments, was insulting in its enjoyment of the frost that meant death to them. They calculated the cost of the luxury in which the Queen (instantly recognisable even if masked) drove her shell-shaped sleigh with the tossing white feathers, on her own and on the horse's head, flying past down the Bois de Boulogne to the tinkling of innumerable little gold and silver bells. The resentment of the mob at such luxury of equipage, which did not dare to show itself openly against the Queen, vented itself upon Mademoiselle Duthé ("*institutrice des plaisirs*") at

Longchamps. This lady's coach was of the costliness usual where no question of payment arises; its body was supported upon a large gold cockle shell, whose inner curve was mother of pearl; the naves of the wheels were of solid silver; the panels of the coach were painted by a pupil of Boucher, the carpet was formed of the plumage of tropical birds and cost 36,000 livres [£1,440], the satin cushions (of *vert celadon*) were stuffed with scented herbs from Montpellier; and the white horses, harnessed in green and gold, bore the white plumes of feathers to which the populace had grown accustomed upon the carriages of the Queen. The people of Paris were mute before the equipage of the Queen, but the frantic luxury of *Duthé* (the Royal accompaniment to "*biscuit de Savoie*") drove them into fury; they hissed and hustled the lady, in her semi-royal state, and the mother-of-pearl coach took final refuge in the pound.

In February Marie Antoinette, so long uninterested in political matters, suddenly awakens to the position that war with England is to be anticipated; and that France will have to guard her own interests as well as to forward those of the Emperor of Austria. She writes: "Our relations with England are thrown into great confusion; the English have attacked several of our ships, so that we no longer think it necessary to hide the preparations we have made here to repay their insults; our vessels are being armed, and the artillery and troops are proceeding into Bretagne. Perhaps our

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preparations will teach them wisdom ; it is not yet certain that war is inevitable. I have just seen Mercy ; after all that he tells me, and that I have seen for myself, I hope that the little clouds that enemies have tried to raise, may disappear, and that there will be no change in the alliance so valuable to Europe, in which there can be no one whose interest is greater than is mine."

All Mercy's thoughts are on the same subjects, Bavaria and England. He tells the Empress that Marie Antoinette, hitherto so disinclined to affect an interest in politics, is filled with genuine dread lest anything should diminish the friendship between Austria and France. The prospect of war with England is less disturbing than a rupture of the alliance ; and the Queen devotes time and attention to Mercy's lessons, who repeats to her the arguments she is to use in conversation with Louis, of the rights that the Empress has over Bavaria ; and he uses all his skill to foresee the insinuations that Frederick the Great may have made to Louis' ministers, and to forearm her with arguments against them. The de Choiseul party regard the future with hope, almost with certainty, that in the event of an outbreak of war with England, " the burden of State would be too heavy for the Comte de Maurepas to support, then it would be necessary to turn to a man with brains, and the Duc de Choiseul was the only man for the office." These opinions were uttered freely by the supporters of de Choiseul, amongst whom was the all-

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powerful Comtesse de Polignac, who had been won over to their side, although she was a relative of the Comte de Maurepas and under obligations to him. But against the selection of the Duc de Choiseul were ranged the Empress, who feared his patriotism, which would withhold the assistance that she, for the sake of her son, so much desired; Joseph, who had called him "turbulent and restless"; and Louis himself, who clung with all the obstinacy of a man of weak intellect to the ridiculous idea, instilled into him when he was a child. He had been told that his father, the Dauphin, had been poisoned by de Choiseul, out of spite because he favoured the Jesuits; and although the illness and death of the Dauphin were known, even to the medical expert of that time, to have been due to consumption, the early aversion continued unchanged, and the claims and merits of de Choiseul were small in comparison.

Mercy interrupted his letter to the Empress (which details his plan of gradually "accustoming, even forcing the King to reason," by Marie Antoinette's prepared arguments) by a visit to Versailles to see the Queen; and when he takes it up again it is to give bad news. He had found the Queen more agitated, more uneasy, than he had ever seen her in any circumstances. She had an interview with her husband; in it she had been talking with earnestness on the Bavarian affair, exposing the intrigues of Frederick, showing the danger to the alliance, and dwelling upon the advantage to France which this alliance would be in her war with England, for she would only have to think of her

sea forces, and be quite secure from attack on the Continent. Louis then spoke: "It is the ambition of your relations that is upsetting everything; they began with Poland and now they have gone on to Bavaria. I am sorry, for your sake." And when Marie Antoinette exclaimed that he could not deny he had been told and had agreed about Bavaria, the King said that far from agreeing, he had told his ministers they were to send to all the Courts of Europe and say that the King did not approve it.

The shock of these words, with the knowledge that if his ministers had actually succeeded in imbuing Louis with these views, his slow, obstinate nature would not permit him to turn from them, was terrifying to the Queen; who felt the alliance at stake and remembered the words of her mother: "If the alliance breaks, it will be my death." Mercy had small comfort to offer. Too good a courtier to give his opinion unasked, there is a silence as to the very name of the Emperor which reveals it. There are no more references to his great powers, his noble and enlightened mind, and his wisdom. Mercy's sympathy is with his Empress, stricken in her last years by calamities that she sees rushing towards her, invited by the precipitate action of her son. Mercy's reliance is on the war with England; France dare not then risk the loss of the friendship of Austria. England has once before thrown her armies (sixteen thousand British, sixteen thousand Hanoverians in *British* pay, for George II. risked no Hanoverian cash, six thousand Hessians)

into Germany to fight for Marie Thérèse, and had routed the French army under the Duc de Gramont at Dettingen; and if Austria's alliance is flung off, England would again do as she had done so short a time before, and would attack France both by land and by sea.

Mercy tells the Empress in his secret report the attitude he intends to take up towards the ministers, who are, he says, "unintelligent men, who become like lunatics when they are pre-occupied with anything, and may thus be led easily into errors." He is going to be "confident, frank, and to speak with studied moderation, to make them feel that while your Majesty holds strongly to the alliance it is more from personal sentiment than from State reasons." And he will insinuate convincingly that now is the "unique and priceless opportunity for humiliating England," which will be lost if that Power is enabled to approach Austria by breach of the alliance with France.

Mercy says also that the Queen is interested heart and soul, that she is learning from him all the delicate shades of political views by means of which she can best work upon the ministers; that she has changed her manner of life in the anxiety that now fills it, is far more often with and more attentive to the King, that even the gambling has suddenly lost interest in face of the game of life in which she is now called to play; and he begs the Empress to send a few lines to confirm the Queen

in this new sense of responsibility. "A line, a single phrase, from your Majesty moves the Queen more than two hours of my political reasoning. . . . I saw the Queen grow pale as she read the words, '*ce qui me donnerait la mort*,' the shock of which threw her into the utmost agitation." This awakening to responsibility was exploited by Joseph to the political ruin of Marie Antoinette, for it was one of the fiercest denunciations against the Queen in after years that, urged by her affection for her family, she had strained all her power and influence over the King for the benefit of Austria, to obtain the loan of ten millions to the Netherlands in payment of the expenses of Joseph's unsuccessful war.

Marie Thérèse responded to the spur. She wrote to Marie Antoinette: "It is five o'clock in the morning, and I write to you in utmost haste, for the messenger waits at my door. I was not warned in time, and they press for his departure that the message may reach the King quickly, and dispel the black and malicious insinuations of the King of Prussia. I trust that the King is aware of their character, and will not let himself be misled by villains; and I rely on his justice and his tenderness for his dear little wife. I give no details; the Emperor and Mercy will take that duty upon themselves. . . . Think how deeply I am feeling! The interest of both our houses, still more, of both our States and of Europe, depends upon the alliance. I pray that there may be no

Vienna, 19 February, 1778.

precipitation, and that all will try to gain time that may save the outbreak of a war that, once begun, may last long, and bring griefs to all of us. Think of my own personal anxiety. The Emperor and your brother [Maximilian] and Prince Albert [brother-in-law of Marie Antoinette] will be the chief leaders. The mere idea makes me sink, but I can prevent nothing, and even if I do not sink under this, my life will be worse than death."

To Mercy the Empress can speak with full confidence. She tells him her apprehensions: "You know how much it costs me to embark upon these affairs of Bavaria, undertaken in complete opposition to my opinions. . . . I beg of you to employ all your zeal and all your skill in maintaining my alliance with the King of France, which is already shaken by the insidious insinuations of the King of Prussia and our own interference with Bavarian matters. The rupture of this alliance would fill the measure of my unhappy life." She repeats in this letter her conviction that Marie Antoinette is attached to her family and determined to give every proof of goodwill; but she fears her levity will not permit her to act with prudence, and that she may weary the King and make him suspicious without gaining any real benefit. The word "ambition," thrown out by Louis in reference to the Austrian "relations," had stung the Empress the more deeply as she recognised its truth; and she feared the result of such opinion. She dreaded the possible return

3 March, 1778.

of de Choiseul, triumphantly snuffing the air with his conquering "*nez au vent*," his restless spirit, his vindictive temper, "which could not fail to have been roused by our coldness." She dreaded even more the possible d'Aiguillon, of openly anti-Austrian policy, and with many slights and injuries from the Queen to avenge. The one thing certain seems that change is imminent, but in no course can she see hope; and she says piteously, as she had twice repeated in the letter to Marie Antoinette: "Think of my position! We have already received a great humiliation from the Duc de Deux Ponts, which will lead to sad issues. His good faith and confidence would have been worth two hundred thousand men."

Charles Augustus, Duc de Deux Ponts, or Herzog Karl von Zweibrücken, to mention the title by which he is more familiar in German history, was the heir presumptive of Charles Theodore, the easy-going, purchasable Palatinate Elector, who, having no legitimate heir, was not mindful of the future of Charles Augustus. When the contract for the partition of Bavaria became known, and Austria's troops already marched to take possession of her share, it was found that the "monster," Frederick the Great, had taken measures with the Duc de Deux Ponts and was prepared to press his claim to the heritage that was passing from him. Thus Joseph, at once headstrong and tardy, had committed himself to military movements which Frederick the Great with instant joy took as an excuse to fling his armies into Bohemia.

Louis was interesting himself secretly in trying to arrange terms of peace; not between the nations that so earnestly desired his intervention, but between Russia and Turkey, whose war had dragged on for years; and the success of the French plans of pacification was a renewed blow to Austria, for Catherine of Russia, released from the Turkish affair, proceeded immediately to ally herself with Frederick the Great. It was vain to invoke peace in Europe, for the year 1778 saw the world at war. France, the peace-maker, at once embroiled herself with England; and Spain followed her Bourbon lead, but she paid with Gibraltar for the play.

CHAPTER XII

Declaration of War with Great Britain—The Policy that led to it—Manner of announcing it—Reception in Britain—British Measures—Recall of the British and French Ambassadors—Voltaire in Paris—The Church in France—Voltaire receives all Paris, but the Court refuses Recognition—The Maréchale de Luxembourg—Balls at the Opera—The Comte d'Artois strikes the Duchesse de Bourbon in Public—Duel between the Duc de Bourbon and the Comte d'Artois.

"THE King has announced to the King of England that he has made a treaty with the Americans. My Lord Stormond received on Sunday the command from his Court to leave France. There is every prospect that our fleet, which has for long been busily preparing, will soon be on active service. God grant that all these measures may not bring about a war by land also!" **Versailles, 18 March, 1778.**

Thus simply runs the letter of Marie Antoinette to her mother that tells of the Declaration of War with England. The policy that dictated the rupture was as simple. It was the same that has guided all despotisms from the commencement of the world,

—the policy of diversions. In Rome the means of distracting attention from abuses was to give *panem et circenses*. The Government of Louis XVI. had no bread to offer the discontented millions of France; but there could be no more popular "circus" than the prospect of a war with hated England, at a moment that seemed favourable to even the most cautiously vindictive.

England seemed sinking; appeared beaten to her knees. She was alone against a world in arms, without an ally, without even a friendly neutral Power; she was waging a hopeless, dogged fight with the States, the failure of which was certain; she was being drained of men, of money, and of ships; her troops were exhausted; her armies, consisting of the (well-paid) scrapings of the Continent, were thousands of miles from the heart of England, which lay open to attack. The reports of French spies (amongst whom was the Duc de Lauzun) were filled with news of the discontent in the navy and of the sailors' murmurings against their pay, that remained as it had been fixed in the reign of Charles II., although the price of necessaries had risen at least 30 per cent. The division of political feeling was noted as proof of national weakness; the "popular" grumblings against the Government (to use the word in double significance) were construed into a possibility of internal enfeebling dissension. Walpole wrote: "James I. was contemptible, but he did not lose an America! His eldest grandson sold us, his younger lost us—but we kept ourselves.

Now we have run to meet the ruin—and it is coming!"

No wonder therefore that the French ministers hailed the opportunity as a God-send. To deal a blow at the supremacy of England at a time when her whole strength was required as shield, and she could not therefore hit back; to pacify the turbulent mobs of France by the glittering prospect of cheap glory in lieu of the reforms they demanded; to gain from them fresh supplies instead of having to yield concessions of revenue, and at the same time to ship off all the wildest, most effervescent spirits to America on pretext of taking part in a just struggle—these were chances too promising to be missed. For the bitterness still rankled that had been felt in 1763, when the Peace of Paris gave England Canada and its dependencies, Cape Breton and all the islands of St. Lawrence, Senegal in Africa, the East Indies and part of Louisiana; and France had been left with a navy almost annihilated and her best colonies lost. Now there was little fear of loss or of danger; the dreaded British navy was encumbered with the duty of guarding the British commerce on all the seas of the world, and was (they believed) rotten with discontent. Expenses would be paid by the capture of British merchant ships that our naval strength was inadequate to guard; and France had been diligently working at her navy, as Marie Antoinette confessed, for two years in the ambition of striking a blow when the chance should come.

The chance came, and the French ministers seized it. To show the contempt the Government of France had for its feeble Royal figure-head, it is only necessary to point out that although Louis XVI. signed the treaty with the American States only on 11 March, 1778, the ministers had sent copies of this treaty, with all the force which such Governmental despatch could give, to America in the *previous* month, hastening their envoy in the frigate *Andromède* which had sailed in *February*.

13 March, 1778.

The notification of this treaty was duly conveyed to Lord Weymouth by the Marquis de Noailles, French Ambassador to London; and the tenor of the despatch and its insolent manner of delivery raised a storm of furious indignation in this country. Walpole wrote on 17 March: "The French Ambassador notified to Lord Weymouth on Friday that his Court had concluded a treaty of commerce and amity with the independent States of America, but has had the *attention* not to make it an exclusive treaty, so that we may *trade* with America if America will condescend to trade with us. And some words of France not being disposed to be molested in their commerce with their new friends." This notification is dated 13 March, 1778, is signed "Le Marquis de Noailles" and begins: "The United States of America which are in full possession of independence (*en pleine possession de l'indépendance*);" and the clause to which Walpole refers runs: "[France and United States] have had the attention not to stipulate for

any exclusive advantages in favour of the French nation."

The scene in Parliament upon the reception of this communication is historical. The act of France in concluding an alliance with States, over which Great Britain still claimed sovereignty, with which she was in open war, was denounced as "a formal and premeditated act of aggression equivalent to a declaration of war." Lord Chatham's dramatic appearance in the House, to protest against the weakness of submitting to the dictation of France, with the former fiery spirit flaming through the failing strength of a dying man: and his fall, struck down by his death-blow, as he delivered his protest, were the signal for war; and England, bristling with indignation, prepared for a fresh enemy, while France found herself much inconvenienced by the prompt measures taken by Great Britain, even before the decision of Parliament announced formal hostilities.

Friction had been great for some time past. Marie Antoinette made mention, in her letter of 13 February, of the English attacks upon French vessels, and the French determination to repay these insults; the chief cause of these outbreaks was the fact that prizes, taken at sea by American ships, were conveyed into French ports, to the fury of the British who saw them escape under the protection of an ostensibly friendly Power. It was known also that France was continually supplying the Americans with arms; that the French Government itself had sent thirty thousand "fire-

locks," two hundred brass field pieces, and other military stores, despatched on a sloop of war, as long before open warfare as 1776. But the protests of England only resulted in the conclusion of an arrangement by which these munitions were not to be sent openly and free, but to be paid for by a return of American produce, tobacco, etc. The artillery that captured Burgoyne was obtained from France. The temper of the British was not prepared to regard the limits of a neutrality so honeycombed with breaches; and the instant course was now taken of seizing all materials for arming or constructing ships of war which they found in neutral bottoms and consigned to French ports.

A *Histoire de la dernière Guerre entre La Grande Bretagne et Les États Unis de l'Amérique, La France, L'Espagne et La Hollande*, published in 1787 in Paris, gives a tedious but pleasantly innocent account of the French attitude from 1775 to 1783; and it regards this British *riposte* to the French Declaration of War, in the most childlike manner, as a little unfair, seeing the French were not quite ready to play. "[This act] greatly hindered the French from proceeding, as it was thereby rendered impossible for them to arm;" and it continues to dwell upon the difficulty of getting munitions of war, masts, rigging, and the like necessaries delivered to their ports because the English were most unkindly blockading the whole of the French coasts. However, the French Minister of Marine checkmated the English move by discovering—

apparently the question had never been contemplated before—that it was possible to convey these essential "*mâtures*" by using the canals of Flanders and Picardy; and the "*Histoire*" above-mentioned details gleefully how they managed to get their stores from Holland in spite of England's meanness. They came to Cambray by the canals of Dort and l'Escaut, or by the canal of Bruges; from Cambray they were carried fourteen leagues over land to St. Quentin, then *en trains* they floated by the Crozat canal to Chauni; thence they entered the Oise and descended to Conflancs St. Honorine; thence they ascended the Seine to the canal of Briare, traversed it, and fell into the Loire, which they descended to the Ile d'Aindret below Nantes; there they were embarked on barges, which carried them to Brest and Rochefort. In the meantime the French fleet waited in harbour, and decided that England did not play the game fairly.

The French had, naturally, seized all British vessels that were in their power. Walpole writes: "France has stopped all our shipping in their ports and our omniscient Lord Stormont learnt that piece of news at Boulogne, being detained there by the embargo. . . . He must either stay there or come round by Holland;" so even the passage of the Ambassador was forbidden. Lord Stormont, being an honest man and desirous of paying his just debts, advertised in Paris on 17 March, the day before his departure, that all creditors were to present themselves at the Embassy, and to bring their bills if they wished

to be paid, as he would not hold himself responsible for payment after the 20th of that month. Paris, or at least the Court, regarded this as an eccentric proceeding, and were not sure whether it should not be taken as a fresh insult to France. It is probable that the Paris tradespeople did not look upon it in that light; and were thankful to pocket the insult of payment in consideration of the rarity of such an event among French Ambassadors.

The recall of Lord Stormont from Paris was simultaneous with that of the detested Marquis de Noailles from London; and the Duc de Lauzun wrote on 18 March to de Vergennes a vivid description of the terror that the departure of de Noailles had caused in London. Fear and general consternation are his lightest terms to describe the departure of an Ambassador whose manner had been as unfortunate as his policy had been unpopular. He says: "There is no misery that they do not expect in consequence; and this nation, so long blind to its situation, is now awakened to its inevitable disasters, and can see neither remedy nor consolation." As de Lauzun wrote this description of London's panic from the depths of his isolation "in the profoundest retreat" at Bath; and as he adds fatuously that he has not "sufficient fatuity to attribute to myself all the credit of this event," the value of his testimony may be gauged.

With so brilliant and inexpensive a campaign opening before France, there is time to study the strangers within the gates of Paris. Amongst them

was Voltaire, who had been permitted to return to Paris, after an absence of more than twenty-seven years. This permission of Louis XVI. filled the austere of France with horror, but it was not followed by any gracious presentation of the philosopher at Court such as he had wished, to atone for the neglect of Joseph II. At the time of the outbreak of war with England Voltaire was one of the chief spectacles of Paris. He had arrived on 10 February, about four o'clock in the afternoon, to be the guest of that M. le Marquis de Villette of whom Madame de Créquy wrote that he was a perfect fool ("*un ridicule achevé*"), and Madame du Deffant described as a comic nullity ("*un plat personnage de comédie*"), and both ladies were right. Voltaire's impatience for notoriety would not permit him to remain in his host's house an hour after his arrival in Paris ; he rushed out instantly to call upon his friend d'Argental at the Quai d'Orsay. He fled along the Paris streets, wrapped in a vast pelisse of crimson velvet trimmed with gold braid and sables, with a woollen wig on his shrivelled head ; and above that a furred bonnet of crimson velvet. The passers-by stood and gaped, thinking it was a masquerader ; and the *polissons* followed and hooted, so that Voltaire was assured of attention.

The house of the Marquis and Marquise de Villette ("*Belle et Bonne*") was in the Rue de Beaune. It was a remarkable building and well suited to its owners ; all its space was sacrificed to one vast *salon*, the roof of which reached to the attics ; the dining-room was

on the second floor and was reached by a rustic ladder of twisted woodwork, and the walls were ingeniously covered with paper to give the illusion of country bowers. It is needless to say in such circumstances that the bedrooms were sketchily designed. "Madame le Marquise sleeps in a cupboard at the end of the corridor; Monsieur le Marquis lives, economically, under the tiles, in the midst of the representation of a seafight."

Voltaire received all Paris in his bedroom. There was an ante-chamber in which the crowds waited and were introduced one by one to the gifted writer, who spoke to each in return for a compliment; and then turned his back upon him, to correct ostentatiously the proofs of his tragedy of *Irène*. He was wrapped in his velvet pelisse and wore a nightcap, saying he could not dress, as he was dying; but he received from 7 a.m. till 10.30 p.m., as gratified vanity does not kill. Paris went mad over the famous genius with the geographical religious convictions; all the most celebrated men and women flocked to the bedroom in the Rue de Beaune; the Académie Française and the Comédie Française sent deputations; all the world came to pay homage. But the Court remained icily indifferent to the presence of the man termed by Marie Thérèse, the despiser of Divinity; and Voltaire's cup of happiness was poisoned by this. He sighed for the honours of the Court, and hoped that the production of his tragedy, "*Irène*," would induce the King and Queen to receive him. He toiled at the perfecting of

his work, received the actors who were to play in it, M. Bellecourt and the extremely stout Madame Vestris who was to be "*Irène*" (and who played it in a Chinese dress). He heard of the death of Lekain who was to have taken a leading part in it; and he first fainted, and then tied crape round his nightcap, for over this tragedy many comedies were played; and the Place de Notre Dame grew black with priests hurrying to the archbishop to implore him to remove this anti-Christ that all Paris was worshipping.

But the priests had little weight in France; the Church was silent, "like a dumb ox, lowing only for provender (of tithes)," and full twenty years had passed since its voice carried conviction as it pressed for the execution of the Anti-Protestant laws, that condemned a preacher of those principles to death, or forbade burial to the body of a follower of the Bishop of Ypres. Even in the churches themselves there was a significant diversion provided for the entertainment of those guests whom habit took to mass. The family prayer-books remained there in readiness in the family gallery, and readers studied piously therein, when setting an example by their presence to the common folk; but the smiles on the faces of these worshippers were not due to religious exhortations. Within the sacred book covers (as provided by the Archbishop of Narbonne, Monseigneur Dillon, for such of his flock as were of quality), were *chroniques scandaleuses*, that beguiled the tedium of the service, and remained on the shelves of the

family place of worship for the edification, between services, of the church cleaners at Hautefontaine. Freemasonry took the place of religion: one of its most worthy supporters was Grand Master the Duc de Chartres, the intimate of the Prince Regent, who had made his wife, the Duchesse de Chartres, a Freemason at the Lodge of the Folie Titon in Paris, on 28 February 1776, an example followed by many. The Church, with de Rohan as its representative (now Cardinal by interest of Stanislas Poniatowski, King of Poland), was powerless against the welcoming of Voltaire; even the Comte d'Artois (in defiance of the King's wishes) sent a message of compliment.

The visits of all the chief Court celebrities are chronicled, despite the Royal opposition. The aged Maréchal Duc de Richelieu, *l'ami à pendre et à dépendre*, called to see the contrast between the "hero of a century of gallantry" and the philosopher, both men of eighty-four years of age; and it is said the shrivelled Voltaire, in his nightcap, looked better preserved than the Duc, who appeared magnificently dressed, in all his decorations, and with his wrinkles gathered up and *fastened* under his peruke. Madame du Deffand called also—Walpole's "old, blind debauchee of wit," "*la femme* Voltaire" of others—and was received with great respect by his niece Denis whom she describes as "the best woman in the world, *mais certainement la plus gaupe.*" But Madame la Maréchale de Luxembourg, whose homage was conveyed in written eulogies of Voltaire's "*Orestes*"

and covered four large pages, was less fortunate; for all his reply was: "Madame la Maréchale, *Orestes* is not spelt with an 'H.' I remain, with deep respect. . . ."

Madame de Luxembourg (formerly Duchesse de Boufflers was the daughter of the Duc de Villeroy, the wife of one Duc de Boufflers and the mother of another, and her granddaughter, Amélie de Boufflers, married the Duc de Lauzun. Walpole says: "The Maréchale has been very handsome, very abandoned, and very mischievous. Her beauty is gone, her lovers are gone, and she thinks the devil is coming." She was known by her intimates, the de Choiseuls, as "*la chatte rose*," and she lived with her relative Madame de Boufflers (directress of the late Prince de Conti), when that Idol was *visiblement cachée* at Arles in consequence of the cessation of her office. The confusion that now exists between the various Mesdames de Boufflers of history was equally disturbing to their contemporaries; and it did not cease upon the marriage of the Duchesse de Boufflers to the Maréchal de Luxembourg, it only became more embarrassing. A story is told of M. de Vaudreuil, one of the most talented men of the Court, who was asked to sing at the reception given by Madame de Luxembourg upon his first introduction to her, and who commenced, in perfect innocence, a song very much in vogue *out* of her presence:

Quand Boufflers parut à la cour
On crut voir la mère d'Amour,
Chacun cherchait à lui plaire. . . .

And then became aware by the horror-stricken coughings of his audience that something was wrong. The Maréchale herself then sang the last line :

Et chacun l'avait à son tour.

Proving her *esprit* to be at least equal to her experience.

This same month of February that witnessed the arrival of Voltaire and the preparations for war with England, had the most extravagant carnival season at the Court. The Queen's ball at Versailles was the talk of Paris ; for the beauty of its masked quadrilles in which, as Mercy said, the dancers were all dressed in Indian robes, and the magnificent dresses and perfect precision of the figures danced, made the entertainment brilliantly successful. A ball was given to the Queen at the Palais-Royal by the Duc d'Orléans on the following night, where her Majesty stayed until five o'clock ; and then went on to the ball at the Opera, where she remained until seven o'clock on Friday morning. Then came the ball given by the Princesse de Guéménée on the Saturday, which lasted until early on Sunday morning. Sunday night saw the masked ball at the Opera, where the Queen remained until six o'clock in the morning. Monday was a day of rest ; and on Tuesday was another ball at the Opera that was productive of much incident, and where the Queen stayed until seven o'clock the next day. The author of the disturbance was the Comte d'Artois, whose manners seem to have been more ruffianly even than usual. The Duchesse de Bourbon



THE COMTE DE PROVENCE.

(*From an engraving by Verité.*) [*Page* 561.

was present and had been talking to the Comte d'Artois ; the subject of their conversation, Mercy said to the Empress, he did not know, but the memoirs of the time without Mercy's reticence, give full details of the reason. The Duchesse de Bourbon took hold of the Prince's mask to lift it, when the string broke, and the Comte d'Artois, furious at being unmasked in the Opera ball on Shrove Tuesday, tore off the mask of the Duchesse de Bourbon and struck her a violent blow in the face with his fist, striking her again with the mask whose removal had been the cause of the outburst, and left her without speaking a word further. "Monsieur," who saw the scene, came to the rescue ; and the Duchesse de Bourbon, bleeding, injured, and humiliated, retired under the protection of the other Royal brother, only thankful to find that the disgraceful brutality had passed unnoticed by the crowd, which says much for the general decorum when such trifles attracted no special attention.

It was impossible that such a scandal could be hidden. The Duchesse de Bourbon complained to her brother, the Duc de Chartres ; who laughed and said it was only to be expected, considering the nature of the ball and of the Comte d'Artois, with whom he then went hunting. The Comte d'Artois, who thought but lightly of striking a woman and a Princess of the Blood Royal violently in the face at a public ball, published the story himself, adding many jocular comments ; and the Duchesse de Bourbon,

finding no redress from her brother de Chartres or her father d'Orléans, took the step of publicly revealing the whole story at a large reception at Court, saying that although the Comte d'Artois was the brother of the King, he was none the less a ruffian. The fact had not stirred the Blood Royal; but the term did. "From that moment the Princes of the Blood were in open mutiny," said Mercy. The Prince de Condé, whose daughter-in-law had received this insult, laid the complaint before the King, who would hear nothing against his brother. The Duc de Bourbon (who was not on speaking terms with his wife, for the usual reasons) felt the honour of his name insulted; and sent a challenge to the Comte d'Artois. The public of Paris was by now in the wildest excitement, universal blame was poured upon the Comte d'Artois; and the strain at Court was so intense that the King was obliged to summon a family meeting, for which the following programme was drawn up. All concerned were to meet at the *débotter*, suitably on 14 March, the date of Declaration of War, and when Royalty had taken his boots off, they were to retire into a private apartment; the Duchesse de Bourbon would then apologise for her vigorous epithets applied to his Royal Highness; the Comte d'Artois would then enter and say some *choses honnêtes*, a few fair words, to the Duchesse, and the King would declare the incident closed. All followed their orders except the Comte d'Artois, who said nothing, *honnête* or otherwise, to the Duchesse. The Prince

de Condé left the apartment; the Duchesse de Bourbon was following him when her husband stopped her and began to speak to the King. Scarcely had he uttered his preliminary "Sire . . . " when Louis shouted him into silence and the family party left, more filled with rancour than before the "reconciliation"; and Paris buzzed anew with the scandal, and with inconceivable wrath against the Comte d'Artois.

Honour could now only be saved by blood-letting, other than that of the unfortunate Duchesse de Bourbon. A meeting was arranged in the Bois de Boulogne; the Comte d'Artois drove there, with his best sword under the coach cushions, as M. de Crussol, captain of his Royal Highness's body-guard and his second, relates. The Princes met and arranged a place; it was found too sunny; arranged another under the shadow of a wall; found they could not fight with their spurs on; took them off; found their coats too tight, and took them off also. "They then advanced, sword in hand, and in the first instant the Comte d'Artois received a slight scratch (*une legère égratignure*) on the arm," and M. de Crussol stopped the fight. The Duc de Bourbon declared himself "penetrated with recognition" of the honour paid him; which was a greater penetration than that received by the Comte d'Artois. The two Princes embraced. Honour was quite satisfied. Then the Comte d'Artois rushed to the house of the Duchesse de Bourbon and apologised. That night the injured Duchesse

went to the Théatre Français with her husband, and both were greeted with "extraordinary applause" by the public; Marie Antoinette received fewer acclamations than usual, as Paris suspected her of friendly feelings towards the young ruffian, her brother-in-law; and d'Artois himself was received by the public with marked coldness. The King exiled the Comte d'Artois to Choisy and the Duc de Bourbon to Chantilly, this severe punishment to be for eight days.

CHAPTER XIII

Great Britain and France—Voltaire in Paris—Benjamin Franklin—His Career—His Arrival in France—He becomes the Vogue—The Court Hesitates—The Opinion of Louis XVI. and its Expression—Portraits of Benjamin Franklin—His Presentation at Court—Franklin at the *Jeu de la Reine*—His Dress—His Diplomacy—Louis XVI. and the Equality of Man—La Fayette—Voltaire and His Tragedy—The First of April—The Delirium of Paris—Voltaire's Reception at the Theatre—Marie Antoinette Yawns at the Great Tragedy—Death of Voltaire—His Funeral Procession and Secret Burial.

WHILE Britain, with back to the wall, prepared to fight, not only France, but all the world beside if it cared to risk the combat, and flung savage defiance at foes present and possible, France danced with light heart and delicate, ornamental vices, through the pleasant, costly, glittering froth of the existence that Talleyrand said *was* Life. "*Qui n'a pas vécu avant* 1789 *n'a pas connu la douceur de vivre*," said he. Britain poured out hoarded moneys to equip troops for which the Government could not pay, and would not speak of ruin ; France rushed to easy glory and obvious conquest, without a thought of national bankruptcy. Both nations were blinded, but by

different flames. "Like an infant, we are delighted with having set our own frock in a blaze," said Walpole; and its light of battle scorched the suggestion of surrender, whatever the odds. From France her future was hidden by the smoke of her own incense, offered on the altars of all those strange gods in the Pantheon of caprice, which repaid worship by the ruin of the worshippers. Her eyes were sealed; and the whole *noblesse* of France rushed to pay homage to the two men whose mission it was to root out their caste, by inspiring desires that the people could feel, although they were incapable of recognising their aims.

Voltaire was in Paris, fêted, caressed, worshipped, crowned; "nobles disguised themselves as tavern-waiters to obtain sight of him; the loveliest of France would lay their hair beneath his feet." He, whose abhorrence of the Church was summed up in the repetition in each letter during years, of the phrase "*écrasez l'Infâme*," was treated as a god; he, whose life had been devoted to the destruction of the forms of kingship, was treated as a king. The most irreverent conspired to show reverence to the teaching that demanded their own annihilation. The withered little wit in the mountebank's robes, who swallowed the longed-for ocean of flattery so greedily that he died of its surfeit, was no less inconsistent than his worshippers; for he felt his adulation incomplete while the Court frowned, and the avowed enemy of monarchy sighed miserably for permission to pay his own court to the King and Queen.

But a stronger man than Voltaire was in Paris, representing a power as much greater than his as the force of integration is greater than that of disintegration. Benjamin Franklin had been in France since December 1776; and by 1778 he was one of the idols in the Pantheon of Paris, that worshipped in turn a hero or a new *bouillie* of chestnuts with equal favour and perfect impartiality, until either indigestion or a new fashion in heroes intervened. Benjamin Franklin had many claims on French appreciation. He represented a nation at successful war with their hated enemy, a point their policy could grasp; he came with a world-wide reputation for scientific knowledge, the European foundation of which was its recognition by Paris after the Royal Society of England had treated his papers on electricity with such indifference that they were even omitted from the Reports of the Society's Transactions, and could obtain publicity in England only by the aid of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. France forgave (perhaps she did not even know) that she owed the loss of Canada to the acute and statesmanlike views of Franklin, who, recognising that the Dominion was the vulnerable spot of France, and that its possession would be of the highest value to Britain, pointed the way to the British Government when he was, for the second time, in England, as the agent of the assembly of Pennsylvania. The French welcomed with effusion the ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity, which they hailed as seed from Heaven; and sowed in a soil rank with the

weeds of centuries, sour with oppression, and darkened by incredible ignorance; and they blossomed into 'The Terror."

Franklin's links with England were broken. He had compelled recognition of his abilities; the compositor who had worked in "Little Britain" (behind St. Martin-le-Grand) when Great Britain was blowing the South Sea Bubble, and who had paid eighteenpence a week for his lodging in Duke Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, while planning the diffusion of public intelligence by means of newspapers, had won the degrees of LL.D. and D.C.L. from the Universities of St. Andrews, Edinburgh, and Oxford. He had been in England when the odious Stamp Act was passed; and by his efforts it had been repealed. He had been summoned to the bar of the House of Commons, and had defended the cause of the American Colonies with the utmost eloquence and ability. But no eloquence could stay a Government without judgment but with a majority. Walpole says: "Fortunate it had been for the King and the kingdom had the Court had no majority for these six years! America had still been ours!—and all the lives and all the millions we have squandered! A majority that has lost thirteen provinces by bullying and vapouring and the most childish menaces."

Franklin made his last attempt to prevent an outbreak. He had been commissioned to offer the King (through Lord Chatham) £350,000 a year from America if the obnoxious bills were repealed, but

the petty duties on tea were too tempting and the crass obstinacy of the Government too impenetrable ; and Franklin sailed for Philadelphia in 1775, returning to Europe in 1776 as the representative of the States to France.

He arrived in the glory of success, for the United States sloop *Reprisal* had captured two British brigs on the way ; and Franklin landed at Auray in December, and proceeded to Paris on his embassy to Louis XVI. He was at once received with popular favour, and greeted with acclamations as the "Apostle of Liberty" ; but such titles were cheap and meant nothing without the support of the King, and Franklin had need of all his diplomacy to win his way to practical aid, although this way had been well laid by the efforts of Silas Deane. Still, Franklin became the mode in 1777 ; the ever-sensitive *coiffures* showed the weight of his personality—at least upon the *outside* of heads—and a *coiffure aux insurgens*, with ingenious allegories of the struggle between Britain and America, showed the extent to which the French were prepared to carry their convictions. With the passing of the months of 1777 the popularity of Franklin grew ever greater ; his little house at Passy became a shrine for pilgrimages ; morning, noon, and night coaches rolled down the road to it, all Paris (as usual) flocking to see the new rival to *parfilage* or a fashionable instructor of the deaf and dumb or horse-racing. Robes *à la Franklin* were the only wear ; bonnets, materials, all were named after him ;

and, as a final extinguishing blow to the pretensions of England, *whist* was tabooed and a new game, *le boston*, played in its stead.

As early as February 1777, Franklin experienced these rather unsatisfying tributes. He wrote on 8 February: "Here the ladies are civil; they call us *les insurgens*, a character that usually pleases them; and methinks all the women who smart, or have smarted, under the tyranny of a bad husband ought to be fixed in *revolution* principles and act accordingly." The ladies were indeed very civil. The Duc de Lauzun said: "All the prettiest ladies of the Court and of the town go to solicit the favour of embracing him; and he lends himself very gallantly to their desire." It is not recorded what Franklin thought of these gratifying scenes, which doubtless left the same impression upon him as similar evidences of affection had done upon Walpole, who says gravely: "The Maréchales de Luxembourg and Mirepoix came to Paris to see me; the Duchesse de la Valière embraced me. I am smeared with red like my own crest the Saracen, and, in short, have been so kissed on both cheeks that had they been as large as Madame de Virri's they would have lost leather."

But rouge, even when administered by the prettiest ladies at Court, was not what Franklin had come to France to seek; and the Court still hesitated. To receive Franklin would be equivalent to open hostilities; and Louis (or, rather, his Government) was not prepared for this. Louis himself had no sympathy with wild

enthusiasms; nor with the evidence of such that took the form of wearing Benjamin Franklin's portrait in clay medallions, or in miniatures, on lids of snuff-boxes, in rings, in bracelets, and on everything susceptible of being painted. It was a very usual form of adoration for the latest hero. The Dowager Duchesse d'Aiguillon wore the portrait of Charles Stuart, the Young Pretender, in her bracelet, with the head of the Saviour on the reverse; the connection in this case being supplied by Madame de Rochefort, who declared the text, "My Kingdom is not of this world," applied to both. But Louis XVI. was incapable of hero-worship; and when the Comtesse Diane de Polignac wearied him with even more obtrusive devotion to Franklin than the rest of the Court ladies, he showed his sentiments in the delicate and refined manner usual with his jests. He sent her a present of a specimen of Sèvres porcelain, manufactured after his special command; and with the portrait of Benjamin Franklin painted inside. But the nature of the specimen of porcelain must be read in French memoirs.

Joseph II. had not shown any more enthusiasm than his brother-in-law, although his curiosity had led him, when in Paris, to try and arrange an apparently unpremeditated interview with Franklin by the medium of the Abbé Niccoli, but they did not meet; and Joseph's well-known expression, "*mon métier à moi est d'être royaliste*," forbade any feeling for those engaged in the overthrow of sovereignty. Marie Antoinette, "the daughter of the Cæsars," with all

her quick sympathy for those oppressed, her intense admiration of all courage, her pride in any great and daring deed, recognised the danger to the principle of monarchy in the wild support given to *les insurgens*; and she feared the spread of Republican doctrines in a nation unaccustomed to self-control and rendered incapable of self-government by six centuries of despotism.

The French people, however, declared war months before the Government took that step; and to judge by the gazettes and the talk in assemblies, war might have been in open progress by the middle of 1777. The discontent in the army grew every day more pronounced; pay was uncertain and poor at best. It was true that the army had been paid in the reign of Louis XV.; but to raise the sum necessary to wipe off arrears the King had to suspend payment of the *billets de rescription*, and revenues were dwindling. Peace had lasted many years, since 1763; there was no chance of promotion, for nothing removed the seniors in command; and the only thing lacking to an outbreak was an opportunity. In these circumstances a battlefield must either be found or made, and young French officers began to leave their regimental duties to go to America, with or without furlough. It says much for their state of discipline when we read that many officers had already gone, but that "their absence was unnoticed." The French memoirs say that Franklin employed every means in his power to induce the French officers to desert



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

(From an engraving by Aug. de St. Aubin, after C. N. Cochin.)

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their duties and go to America, either openly or secretly. But in one of Franklin's quiet letters from Passy he says that Congress had been so greatly embarrassed with crowds of officers arriving from other countries, each coming with strong recommendations, that the only course open was to *ship them back again* "at above a hundred thousand livres expence."

The surrender of Burgoyne had been the spark to all this train; and its immediate result was pressure upon the Government to recognise the United States, and to receive their representative, Benjamin Franklin. The great ceremony of presentation took place in March, immediately after the Declaration of War with England, and Benjamin Franklin, accompanied by about twenty "*insurgens*" (three or four of whom were in uniform), was presented to the King, to the Queen, and to all the Royal family, and recognised as the Ambassador of America by the Comte de Maurepas and the Comte de Vergennes. He was honoured by a special invitation to the Court, in the evening to the *Jeu de la Reine*, and Marie Antoinette distinguished him by gracious and marked attentions. The dress of Franklin had long been a subject of great interest in Paris, although even his immense vogue had not led to its general adoption. He appeared everywhere in the snuff-brown cloth suit of an American farmer, simple, very severe. He describes himself: "I am very plainly dressed, wearing my thin, grey, straight hair that peeps out under my only *coiffure*, a fine fur cap, which comes down my forehead

almost to my spectacles. Think how this must appear among the powdered heads of Paris!"

Madame Campan records her amazement at "his straight hair, without any powder, his round hat, his brown cloth suit, contrasting with the be-jewelled, embroidered dresses and powdered, scented *coiffures* of the Court at Versailles." Madame de Créquy, to whom simplicity was insufficiently piquant, did not appreciate this fashion of admiration; and regarded a breach of the sacred etiquette of dining as worse than an infraction of the Decalogue. She sat next Franklin at supper, and noticed every flaw in accepted traditions—long hair, "like a diocesan of Quimper," brown coat, brown vest, brown breeches, "and hands of the same colour"; a linen cravat; but most remarkable of all, his way of eating fresh eggs. He took five or six eggs, broke them into a goblet, put butter, salt, pepper, and mustard; and then "nourished himself with little spoonfuls of this *joli ragoût philadelphique*." He bit his asparagus and took a knife to his melon. "*Vous voyez que c'était un vilain sauvage.*"

The Marquise de Créquy seems to have been the only person at Court who regarded Franklin malevolently. The world of Paris thought otherwise, and exhausted itself in *fêtes* in honour of him and his doctrine of equality. Competition was keen among three hundred beauties as to the most worthy to place a laurel wreath on his white locks. And Franklin, who, in his capacity of man of science, was

impressing upon France the merits of *lightning conductors*, was well aware that in his capacity as man of society he was himself serving as one. By his philosophy in accepting the homage of a Court, that gave to his principles almost as much admiration as it did to the spectacle of his Royal Highness the Comte d'Artois dressed in spangles and dancing on the tight-rope, he won all hearts; and the appreciative world noted that he permitted his two grandsons to wear shoes with red heels, for *talons rouges* implied so much more than a mere reference to leather.

Although the Court thus prattled of equality and the rights of man, an edict signed by Louis XVI. spread despair and furious resentment in the middle classes of France, and flung them back into the serfdom of the peasantry. The middle classes, which comprised the only educated, intelligent, and progressive men of France, and furnished the main support of all professions and sciences in the country, were forbidden to aspire to hold any rank in the army. No man could rise to any military grade unless he could prove four quarterings of nobility. No "*roturier*," except he were the son of a Chevalier of Saint Louis, could hold any military command, whatever his merits; and the great provincial families of country gentlemen, who had owned their lands for centuries, paid their taxes, and supported their country, were thus stigmatised as unworthy of holding commissions in the service of the King. These great

country families, untitled gentlemen, had followed the usual choice of professions, the eldest son administered the estate, and, if it were in a wine country, added to that duty the trade in his own wine; the second son went into the army, the third into the law or the Church. By this edict the military profession, of all dearest to Frenchmen, was closed to them; and a man might succeed to the highest rank in the Diplomatic service, might, through his wife, be connected with officers of the highest military rank, and yet be unable to obtain a commission for a son because he was a "*roturier*."

All honours were poured upon the Marquis de la Fayette, who, at the age of twenty, preferred to leave his country and his wife, and fight in the cause of sacred liberty in America; but none was given to those whose patriotism led them, untitled, to desire to fight for France.

This same month of March 1778, that had seen the presentation of Benjamin Franklin at Versailles, saw the apotheosis of Voltaire. "*Irène*" was to be produced at the Comédie Française on 1 April; and Paris prepared a reception of "the new Apollo" which was worthy of the occasion—and the date. By way of preparation, Voltaire dressed for the first time since his arrival, doffed the nightcap on 28 March, and appeared in public in a huge brown unpowdered wig of the reign of Louis XIV., in which his little shrivelled head disappeared, showing only eyes "brilliant as carbuncles," gleaming like those of a wild cat in a bush.



VOLTAIRE.

(From an Engraving by N. de Launay, after C. P. Marillier.

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Upon this wig he placed a square red cap that could scarcely find room upon it ; and he donned a robe of scarlet lined with ermine. The news flew that such preparations implied Voltaire would be present at the theatre ; and the world made ready to rush into the streets and take up positions to see him pass. The day came, and on 1 April Voltaire's coach drew up at the house in the Rue de Beaune, where the Marquis de Villette (wearing his name on the red heels of his shoes) and the adoring Marquise, "*Belle et Bonne*," attended. The coach was specially ordered for so great a triumph ; it was painted sky-blue, and powdered with gold stars. But the stars were only of gilt paper, stuck on with paste ; and when the bright sun of 1 April shone upon them they first cockled up, and then fell off the blue leather heaven. Voltaire wore a vast and ancient tunic of blue velvet, trimmed with gold to match the coach ; his stockings had silver clocks ; he wore the huge brown wig of the days of Louis XIV., perhaps because he was a man of twenty-one at the death of the *Roi Soleil*.

He proceeded, through shouting throngs, to the Académie Française, to receive homage such as had been paid to but one mortal before him—the Cardinal de Richelieu. He was made Director without even the form of ballot. Then, through streets lined with madly shouting worshippers, welcoming from every window, every resting-place, to the theatre, where homage became delirium. Paris flung itself in adoration ; the greatest ladies pressed to touch the

hem of his garment, to pluck a single hair from his fur robe ; he was mobbed, pushed, carried into his box, placed between his niece *la gaupe* Madame Denis and the Marquise de Villette, while the vast throng rose in worship and screamed from its thousand throats to crown him with laurel. The actor Brizard brought a crown and placed on the wig of the genius ; Voltaire wept, and the crown hung askew. He took it off and placed it upon Madame de Villette. The bust of Voltaire was erected upon the stage, and encircled with garlands to an accompaniment of kettledrums. But the tragedy of "*Irène*" was a failure ; and a failure also was the final act of the comedy of 1 April. It had been intended that the return procession should be a culmination of triumph, as the poet was to be drawn home by the strong arms of his adorers instead of mere horses. A few enthusiasts dashed to the coach, and cut the traces ; but found, when it came to pulling this sky-blue coach, that the raving crowds had gone home. Nothing could be done but bring back the discarded horses (which had been led away, and kissed, and wreathed with laurels), and mend the traces hurriedly and ignominiously ; while Voltaire shivered inside the coach, with his paper stars falling from the sky.

Either this outburst of frenzied acclamation, or annoyance at the indifference of the King and Queen, was too great a strain upon the patriarch. He heard with fury that Marie Antoinette preferred the Opera to "*Irène*" ; that she had been seen to *yawn* when

"*Irène*" was produced at Versailles, and that the whole Court, in courtly imitation, had yawned in unison till the jaws of Versailles had nearly suffered dislocation. On 30 May the philosopher died.

With his death the Church re-asserted herself. Religion could not stay the worship of an infidel; but she could prevent the burial of his body. His adorers could trick him out in a dramatic, pseudo-classic, funeral procession; but they could not obtain decent interment for his bones. Strange was the ceremony of the funeral. A Quadriga, with a waxen effigy of Voltaire in heroic garb, attended by all the *filles de Paris* (suitably attired as vestal virgins), attended by Greeks, Romans, Gauls, and Mexicans, drew up before the house of the Marquis de Villette. Madame la Marquise came out, dressed *en manière de fantôme*, in a great white *chemise*, and with her hair scattered wildly. She carried her baby, says Madame de Créquy, who loves details; and she had herself hoisted up to the pinnacle of the car, an operation of some difficulty. She set herself to rub this baby against the coffin, till it sent forth piercing cries. No one could explain this funereal rite.

Further facts as to his burial are uncertain. It is said that Voltaire's nephew, Abbé Mignot, had a successful idea by which he tricked the abbey of Scellières into burying him in consecrated ground. He announced to the monks that his uncle had confessed his belief in the faith of his fathers (true, but Voltaire had added, had he died on the banks of the

Ganges he would have preferred to expire with a cow's tail in his hand); that he was dying in the coach outside the abbey and wished to depart this life within its sacred walls. It was said that the long-dead corpse of Voltaire had been propped up in the coach with the wig huddled on its head, the better to carry out this pious fraud; and that the monks buried him with a haste due to more reasons than the fear of a prohibition from the Bishop of Troyes, which arrived on the morrow of the stealthy burial of the worshipped, rose-stifled Voltaire.

But the adoring throngs of Paris quite forgot the man as they polished verses on his memory; and so thick flew the memorial poems that Madame du Deffand said that Voltaire had to submit to the lot of other mortals, and after death become "*la pâture des vers.*"

CHAPTER XIV

Marie Antoinette and her Hope—The Mental Development of Louis—Disappointment of the Princes—Its Outcome—The Queen gives Thankofferings—Rejoicings of the Empress—Effects of the News—Political Change—Households are Appointed—The Royal Governess—The Treatment of Babies—War Declared between Austria and Prussia—Louis and his Ministers—Marie Antoinette and her Mother.

THIS month of April 1778 was for Marie Antoinette the turning-point of her life. It brought to her a hope that transfigured the world. After eight years of marriage in which she had been no wife—years in which she had screened her husband, a man in age only, hidden his incapacity, tried with long patience to stimulate the slowly waking faculties—she could write to her mother that the joy of motherhood might be her own at last. She had borne the bitter disappointments of these years in proud silence; the tears of wretchedness were shed in secret; only to Mercy-Argenteau did she confess her weariness of life and her distaste for her task. He, in deepest sympathy, had preached patience and again patience; had helped her to foster and train the struggling mind of Louis; had encouraged

her by pointing out every sign of improvement in her husband's tardy development; and had even given her renewed hope by little pious frauds that brought comfort.

Even from the mother who blamed her reckless dissipation, she had hidden the reasons that had forced her to seek in its excitement some forgetfulness of her position. She had watched in silence the schemes of the King's brothers, who based high hopes on the incapacity of Louis; and counted even openly on succession to the throne. They had formed their rival Courts, each the centre of intrigues against the welfare of feeble Louis and his wife; and these eight years had turned their anticipations into certainty. Thus to the bitterness of her lot was added the knowledge that her nearest relatives were those who most ardently desired her unhappiness. Her hope of motherhood would be to them the downfall of their ambitions; its realisation was the downfall of the monarchy; for the malice of the baffled brothers sowed the first suspicions against Marie Antoinette, whose harvest was reaped by the guillotine.

It is not often realised that the death of Marie Antoinette, and of her children, lies at the door of the Comte de Provence and the Comte d'Artois. There was no question put to the Queen by the Revolutionary tribunal whose origin may not be traced in the venomous scandals spread by her brothers-in-law. Each horrible accusation was confessedly based upon

suspicions instilled by the two men whose expectations of succession to the throne were swept away by the birth of a child. The first timid hopes of happiness for Marie Antoinette and her passionate thankfulness for the blessing of motherhood, were to their malice the signal for foul slanders, whose dissemination was as surely the cause of her execution as the treachery of the Duc d'Orléans was of that of his cousin Louis XVI.

But Marie Antoinette did not dream of such possibilities of baseness when she wrote the first letter of her hope to her mother. She was too full of happiness, of confidence in her future, of tender little promises that all would now be changed in her life, that her mother would no longer have cause to reproach her with frivolity or recklessness. She says in this letter that her health will be henceforward a matter of interest to herself, and she will guard and watch over her own well-being as she has never cared to do before; for her life has now become of value to herself. She asked Louis for money to give the poor, as a thank-offering for her hopes; 12,000 francs [£480] to be distributed among the debtors detained in prison in Paris for the non-payment of their monthly nurses (a very usual reason for imprisonment); and 4,000 francs [£160] to be given to the poor of Versailles. By the letter of Mercy, confirming the joyful news, we learn the happy agitation of Louis and the rejoicings in Paris, that "are not so spurious as the

Versailles, 19 April, 1778.

congratulations of 'Monsieur' and 'Madame' and the Comte and Comtesse d'Artois;" although their demonstrations had been regulated by due regard for appearances. The sentiments of "Monsieur" were undisguised in his correspondence, however; and he wrote to his friend, Gustavus III. of Sweden (the friend also of Madame du Barry): "You have heard the change in my fortunes. . . . I soon mastered myself—at least outwardly . . . showing no joy (for that would have been too obvious hypocrisy and you can be sure that I felt none at all), nor depression—that might have been construed into weakness of spirit. But the inner man is more difficult to conquer."

The happiness of Marie Thérèse was intense; but her relief at the promise for her daughter's future was mingled with anxiety and the dread of some desperate act on the part of the disappointed intriguers. She showed her fears to Mercy: "I confess that I am in terror for both mother and child. . . . The most atrocious crimes are of no account in a country where irreligion is carried to extremes. Besides, there are the ever-increasing Piedmontese intrigues to fear. I should feel easier if it were possible to place a faithful servant by the side of my daughter; but as that is out of the question I can only trust in Providence, and try to forget the many miserable examples of such horrors as have been furnished by the history of France." In another letter she tells Mercy that her only consolation is his presence

at the French Court: "If I did not have the knowledge that you are with my daughter to sustain me, I should be still more uneasy both for her and for the future of her child." And Mercy apologises for "the lack of precision and order in my humble despatches" with the explanation that he is quite overcome by agitation, and the mingled feelings of joy, hope, and anxiety.

The news was so important, its effects so far-reaching, that Mercy had to readjust his views upon every point of politics. The Queen, as mother of an heir to France, would be a personage of such political importance that she could not longer be regarded as the charming "*petite reine*," merely the beautiful leader of society. Marie Antoinette, if left a childless widow, would be packed off to Austria immediately upon the accession of the expectant "Monsieur;" and Queen Marie Josèphe of Savoy would reign in her stead. Marie Antoinette, as the mother of a "son of France," would remain Sovereign even if the feeble constitution of Louis XVI., or some unfortunate blacksmith accident, removed him from the throne.

The change in her position was shown at once by the attitude of the French ministers. De Maurepas and de Vergennes had been playing with both Prussia and Austria; holding hopes to each and intending to help neither in the matter of Bavaria. Now they had to reckon with Marie Antoinette as a powerful factor; and the change in the political wind blew

them round with ludicrous swiftness. On 30 March the two ministers sent to Austria an insulting refusal to abide by the terms of the Franco-Austrian alliance, as drawn up by the treaty of Versailles. On 26 April they had to withdraw it; and send another messenger with a despatch of different tenor, in which France undertook, in the event of Prussia attacking Austria, to aid her by her forces. This concession had been gained from the blissfully happy Louis by Marie Antoinette, armed with her new power that was strong enough to move the King to action, even to that of setting himself in opposition to his ministers. In order that she might fully carry out her instructions from Mercy, she asked him to write them out for her to learn; she then copied the memorandum and burnt the original, that no one should learn that Mercy had intervened.

Mercy said this was a great advantage gained, "but in dealing with such people as these French ministers, it is necessary to use much patience and persuasion to bring them by degrees into the path of reason"; and he described their little cunning diplomacies as "pitiful conduct due to the ignorance and pusillanimity of the Comte de Maurepas."

Marie Antoinette has now a new game to play and plays it with zest. All gambling ceases suddenly at Court—even billiards is discarded—frivolity is past; music and conversation are her only recreations, and the serious business of sovereignty is taken up, as the only suitable employment of a Queen who hopes to be

the mother of a King. In these new circumstances two men discover fresh chances for their own interests. De Choiseul comes forth from the obscurity of Chanteloup, ostensibly to congratulate, really to convey the suggestion that he alone is the right man to be called to the direction of affairs; and the Abbé de Vermond takes the opportunity of asserting himself, pettishly refuses (in spite of his promises) to remain with the Queen when she most needs him, and after sulking for several days, retires to his abbey of Tiron. Mercy was greatly annoyed by this act of disloyalty, for at no period since 1770 was de Vermond so necessary. He spent two whole days in fruitless persuasion; but even the diplomacy of Mercy could avail naught against wounded vanity. "I found him very sore because the King has never yet spoken one word to him, although he sees him continually when he is with the Queen; from which the Abbé concludes that his Majesty must find his appearance repulsive."

That de Vermond was "*fort laid*" is proved by the records of the time; but his opinion of his own personality is only revealed by his actions. He actually left Paris, in spite of urgent letters from the Queen and the expostulations of his benefactor Mercy, and retired to the enjoyment of the 12,000 francs [£480] income derived from the living he owed to them. The utmost concession that he would grant to their entreaties was that he would come, once a week, to pay his court to the Queen, if her Majesty sent for him. Mercy endeavoured to prevent the difficulties

to which this breach of trust gave rise; and he took up his residence within a short distance of the Court at Marly, that he might be enabled to see the Queen three or four days a week; but he was greatly embarrassed by the Abbé's failure.

Within the Court itself the chief interest centred in the appointment of households, one for the expected heir and one for Madame Elizabeth, the young sister of the King, who was now fourteen years old, and could no longer remain without her own ladies-in-waiting. The Royal Governess was the Princesse de Guéménée, who received this appointment by virtue of her relationship to Madame de Marsan, the function of instruction being considered vested in the family of de Rohan. There was no doubt that the Princesse de Guéménée was capable of instructing upon many matters. She was a great lover of little dogs, and invariably appeared surrounded by a multitude of them. "She offered to them a species of worship, and pretended, through their medium, to hold communication with the world of spirits." She had been convicted of cheating at cards on several occasions. She was distinguished for the urbanity of her manner towards the ladies honoured by her husband's preference, paying the most delicate attentions to each in turn; thus she compelled admiration for her exemplary fulfilment of a wife's highest duty. She entertained magnificently, royally, outshone the whole Court by her dress, and paved the way for the greatest bankruptcy known in France—

the failure that affected all classes of society and plunged France into ruin; for all, from dukes to poor Breton sailors, had invested their moneys in the house of de Guéménée. "Only a King or a Rohan could have made such a failure," was the consoling sentiment of the Princesse, as she contemplated her bootmaker's bill of 60,000 livres [£2,400], or the amount of 16,000 livres [£640] owed to her paper-hanger. And the ruin of the Rohans hastened the Revolution.

The appointment of the Princesse de Guéménée, which had been a well-paid sinecure for years, had drawn no remonstrance from Mercy while there was no prospect of the Royal Governess having any one to govern. But all is changed now. "In accordance with the customs of this Court, the Governess of the children of France has the right to make all arrangements in connection with the elementary education of the Queen's children. The appointment has been given to the Princesse de Guéménée; and there is very much that might be said about this lady." He made no more definite reference to the Duc de Coigny, or to the marriage arrangements, "not halved but doubled," of the Prince and Princesse de Guéménée; but Marie Thérèse was doubtless well acquainted with the facts, as the Empress paid a yearly subscription to ensure the receipt of the Paris scandal-loving gazettes. All Mercy's efforts were aimed at limiting the power of Madame de Guéménée, which gave her the right to select all

29 May, 1778.

the teachers and attendants of the Queen's child; and he saw with relief that Marie Antoinette was determined to retain the decision herself, of rejection or of choice, and herself nominate all who should be privileged to approach her child. He informed the Empress that his advice had resulted in the Queen obtaining a distinct promise from Louis that, "in case Heaven grants a Dauphin," no Governor shall be appointed for five years.

There might be deep peace in Europe for all the references to war which appear in the letters of this time. Austria is on the brink of an outbreak with Prussia; but its Empress writes only directions about baby linen and similar matters. "Be sure and obey your doctor in all things. . . . Babies should not be swathed up too tightly . . . they should not be kept too warm . . . they should not be over-fed with victuals (*mangeailles*). . . . You must look out for a good, healthy nurse, which is a rare thing in Paris, and almost as rare among women from the country because of the corruption of morals." France is at open war with Great Britain, but its Queen does not touch upon it at all; she is engrossed in greater subjects. "Babies are not swaddled here, but are brought up with much more freedom . . . they are always in a cradle or else carried in the arms, and from the moment they can be taken into the fresh air they are accustomed to it by degrees until they practically live out of doors. I consider this the best and most healthy method. . . . Mine will live on the

ground floor with a little railing to keep him from the rest of the terrace; and he will learn to walk there sooner than upon polished floors." And the Ambassador enters into details of deep interest to the mother. "The Queen goes for a walk directly she rises, thus taking moderate exercise in the healthiest hours of the day. She employs the rest of the morning in needlework or in netting purses. . . . She takes another walk in the evening before supper. . . . She is in perfect health."

Suddenly the peace ended. A letter from the Empress, agitated, horror-stricken, conveyed to Mercy the news. Frederick the Great was tired of carrying on a correspondence with Joseph II., the sole object of which appeared to be the providing, by each party, of its own justificatory evidence from the letters of its opponent—for the edification of the French ministry. Both sides had fought stoutly with the pen, and sent its enemy's letters to France; and Frederick II. closed the correspondence by entering Bohemia at the head of his army. 7 July, 1778.

"We are at war. It is what I have been dreading since January; and what a war! With nothing to gain and everything to lose. The King has entered Nachod [in Bohemia, close to the Prussian frontier] in force; he will surround us on all sides, for he has 40,000 more men than we have. You can conceive my despair! God help us if this war ends as I foresee from its beginning! France has assuredly wrought us harm by her secret intrigues with the

King. We may have done her some wrong, but none that counterbalances the shocking indifference that she now shows to our fate. I dare not insist too strongly with the Queen for fear of compromising or affecting her. Show her this letter, if in your judgment you think fit. I should fail in my duty if I placed her suffering above that of her sister Marie, of the Emperor, of my son, and of my son-in-law [Albert of Teschen]. I am overwhelmed. . . . I do not know how I live. Nothing but my faith sustains me, but in the end I shall sink."

To Marie Antoinette the news of war came as a rude awakening from her dreams of happiness. There was no need for spur to her interest. Her anxiety for her mother, for the safety of her brother (who had written her the unjust reproach: "As you do not wish to prevent this war, we shall fight like brave men"), for the future of her house—each was sufficient cause. She poured out her grief and her hopes to her mother; and related her endeavours to force Louis into more active measures for the aid of Austria.

"I had a very touching scene with the King this morning. My dear mother knows that I have never blamed his kind heart; all that happens is due to his extreme weakness and to his lack of confidence in himself. To-day, when he came to see me, he found me so sad and so frightened that he was deeply touched, and he cried." Poor feeble Louis, with the ready tears and the

15 July, 1778.

unready mind, whose only reply to the vehement arguments of his wife that he should try and *rule* was: "You see I have so many faults that I cannot answer a word." Marie Antoinette took up again her almost motherly attitude of excuse for the weak, childish husband, and explained to her mother that he had been too much bothered by the intrigues of the Prince de Condé, who had demanded the command of the troops, and by the trouble the Maréchal de Broglie had given in wishing to take away from the King the right of selecting the officers of the staff; "but he is really very fond of me, and I hope some day that he will learn to take his own part, and will become a true and good ally."

This feeling of protection and pity for the feeble Louis, trying in his dim way to do his poor best, grew stronger in Marie Antoinette as she realised his desire to please her. She had wept too as she told Mercy the story of her interview with the King; how he had come to her with his eyes full of tears, declaring he could not bear to see her in such trouble; that he would like to do anything in the world to comfort her, that he had always wished to do it; but his ministers would not let him, and had told him that the welfare of his kingdom would not permit him to do any more than he had done. She had proved to him that his honour and glory bound him to the alliance with Austria and against Prussia; and he had found nothing to contradict.

But the pity that melted her towards her husband's

failings had no part in her feelings in reference to de Maurepas. She regarded his little quibbles and evasions as breaches of the honour of France. His legerdemain, that strove to atone for uselessness by nimbleness, was beheld by her with righteous contempt; where a great game was to be played she had no patience with any little card trick, however neat. His whole policy was that of avoidance of difficulties, not their removal. As long as he could dance on the surface of power, could "emerge, cork-like, unsunk," from the flood of politics, he cared little for its currents; and (being eighty years of age) the future of France interested him not at all. He had not hitherto found any difficulty in maintaining his equilibrium in office (although his appointment had been due to a mistake of Louis which he had been too shy to rectify), for a ready jest and much suppleness were helpful qualities; but now the Queen had both intention and power, and she insisted upon being present when Louis received his ministers for discussion of State matters.

Mercy described in a despatch one interview between the Queen and de Maurepas. The minister had made his usual shuffling reply to her questions and Marie Antoinette, in indignation, addressed him, saying in a firm, clear voice: "This is the fourth or fifth time that I have spoken to you upon this matter, but you have never made me any satisfactory answer. I have kept patience till now, but things are growing serious, and I will no longer be put off with such evasions."

She then, by the gift that had so often drawn Mercy's admiration, recalled all his views and their expressions, and made a masterly little survey of the whole political scene, exposing all the intrigues with Prussia in their due order, and showing clearly that France, by thus yielding to the tricks of the King of Prussia, had confirmed him in his course instead of deterring him from it. To Maurepas, who did not know the long course of Mercy's training, this quick grasp of the situation by Marie Antoinette was startling; and he confused himself in excuses and in protestations of deep devotion to the Queen, who received them with open dislike.

She told Mercy this episode; and he described it all to the Empress. "I have never seen the Queen so depressed; and in an out- 17 July, 1778. pouring of confidence she said she wished to make me a general confession; she spoke of her amusements, her society, and all the details of her private life, and commanded me to give her my advice upon each point and each person. . . . I did so, with zeal, not omitting one single detail . . . she listened to me with extraordinary kindness, and added that her deep trouble had led her to think seriously of the life that lay before her. . . . She told me she had countermanded a little fête that she had intended giving that day at the Trianon to please the King; because she could not bear to think of amusements—she was too sorrowful for her mother's sake. The Queen shed tears as she spoke."

Marie Antoinette had asked him how she could best convey to the Empress the immense difficulties with which she was contending ; for she could not bear to betray the condition of her husband ; and yet, without exposing his weakness, how could she explain that he was not responsible for the failure of France ? Mercy, who knew that the visit of Joseph II. to his brother-in-law had rent the screen she was so loyally holding up, replied that to a mother all might be said. He insisted strongly that the Queen owed to herself the duty of some diversion ; for if she brooded over the sorrows of her country she might injure her health, and, further, give the public reason to talk of them. He pointed out to Marie Antoinette that this Comte de Maurepas, so vain, shallow, and timorous, could easily be won to her side ; it needed but a little flattery, a little soothing of his self-love, and he would be at her feet. That, as it was not possible to give the King either more nerve or more strength of will, it might be wise to bind the minister to her cause by stooping to a little easy diplomacy and condescension. But Marie Antoinette, upright and honest, had said "it seemed to her a low thing to pretend graciousness to a man she despised."

CHAPTER XV

The War with England—Four months of Naval Preparations—Camps formed in Normandy and Brittany—Plan of Descent upon England—England's Attitude—The French Fleet sails from Brest, and the British Fleet from Plymouth—The Battle of Ushant—The Prudence of a Prince of the Blood—The Price of Admiralty—French Commerce and the British Corsairs—The War between Austria and Prussia—Pressure upon Marie Antoinette—Diversions at Versailles—The Transmission of News in France—The Empress to be Godmother—Marriage of a Relative of the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau—Letter of Marie Thérèse.

MEANWHILE the war with England, for which the stage had been swept in March, had flagged. The unexpected, unsportsmanlike acts of Britain, in stopping supplies and munitions of war immediately upon the insolent Declaration by the Marquis de Noailles, and prowling the Channel with fierce predatory squadrons before France was ready to emerge from her ports, had delayed hostilities until July 1778. Even of the proceedings in July there is little information to be gleaned by searching of records. Carlyle dismisses the majestic sortie of

the French navy, when at length it did emerge, with: "Off Ushant some naval thunder was heard"; which seems a slighting allusion to an action for which four months had been spent in preparation. The French, however, had not been idle in that time. Camps had been formed, at Paramé in Brittany under M. de Castries, and at Vaucieux in Normandy under the Maréchal de Broglie; to the expressed satisfaction of Mercy-Argenteau, who saw in them merely a means of withdrawing dangerous and inflammatory elements from Versailles. "All the principal gamblers at faro will soon be obliged to join their regiments in the camp in Normandy; and that will cause a cessation of this injurious excitement."

On the northern coasts of France thirty-five thousand men mustered; and three hundred vessels, destined to transport them to England, gathered in the ports of St. Malo and Havre. There was a suggestion of sending a detachment of the *Gardes françaises* to Dunkirk, under the command of the Maréchal de Biron; and, with the recollection, doubtless, that the fleet had taken four months to mobilise, the Maréchal was asked whether he could have his men ready in fifteen days. He showed his watch in reply: "It is now one o'clock; at four this afternoon, they shall march, bag and baggage." But there is no record that they started at four o'clock, or even went at all. Troops gathered on the coasts from Calais to Brest—and stayed there. They talked one day of conquering Jersey and Guernsey, the next of seizing the Isle of

Wight and Portsmouth, the next of taking the Bermudas and St. Helena. But the Channel persistently flowed between the forces.

Walpole wrote on 18 July: "Notices are up in Lloyd's coffee-house, that a merchant of the City received an express from France that the Brest fleet, consisting of twenty-eight ships of the line, were sailed with orders to burn, sink, and destroy . . . that Admiral Keppel was at Plymouth, and had sent to demand three more ships of the line to enable him to meet the French. . . . Keppel said that he had the *Worcester*, *Peggy*, *Thunderer*, and others, and when he had received the *Shrewsbury* he should have thirty sail; and would try his strength against the French, on our coasts or on theirs. . . . The French fleet has thirty-one ships of the line, two 50-guns, and eight frigates. . . . Thus you see how big the moment is."

In England the militia was called out and encamped in the south; the stocks fell $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent; and all the inhabitants of Devonshire and Cornwall (according to French history) left the coasts and fled inland with their wives and families.

The future of Britain seemed very gloomy, for the news of the sailing of the French fleet was confirmed; and to the misfortune of the loss of America was added the dread of an invasion from France. "It is hard to be gamed for without one's consent . . . but when one is old, and nobody, one must be whirled with the current and shake one's wings like a fly if one lights on a pebble. The prospect is so dark, that

one shall rejoice at whatever does not happen that may."

Walpole's fears were unjustified by events; Keppel came out with the British fleet and met the French off Ushant on 23 July. Keppel had twenty-five sail, and his flag was on the *Victory*, a 100-gun ship; Palliser was on the 90-gun *Formidable*, and Vice-Admiral Harland on the 90-gun *Queen*. The French ships out-numbered them by five, for they had thirty sail; and they approached with all the prestige of numbers, heavier guns, and the presence of a Prince of "the Blood." But three of the French ships were unable to sail against the wind (for some reason that is not clearly stated in the French *Histoire de la Dernière Guerre*); and this left twenty-seven sail, nominally under the command of the Comte d'Orvilliers, divided in three squadrons of nine ships each. D'Orvilliers was on *La Bretagne* of 110 guns; Du Chaffault on *La Couronne*, with 80 guns; and the Duc de Chartres on the 80-gun *St. Esprit*.

23 July, 1778.

The sultry July day blazed over the ocean. Through all that summer of 1778 France and England lay oppressed in heat whose temperature was "above Indian;" and the battle of Ushant consisted mainly of manœuvres to catch the light airs. It was indecisive; and yet from it sprang great results—of scandal for both sides. Keppel and Palliser worked off their disappointment by mutual incriminations, salted by political differences. Keppel was courtmartialled

on Palliser's charges; and honourably acquitted. London was illuminated at this verdict, and Palliser burnt in effigy; then Palliser demanded a court-martial on himself, and was also acquitted. The French side had its own experience, equally, if not more, improving. The Comte d'Orvilliers signalled his ships to come into line. The French history says: "But this signal, imperfectly understood, was not executed sufficiently quickly to have any effect." The French memoirs are less dignified and less reticent. On the return of the French fleet to Brest the Duc de Chartres hastened to Versailles, to convey the news of a great naval victory. He was received with frantic rejoicings and applause, until the official despatches arrived. Then all was changed; and caricatures and bitter epigrams betrayed the secret. There had been no valiant de Chartres on the quarter-deck, brave in a white waistcoat, glittering with decorations and with the *cordon bleu*. But there had been a de Chartres, hidden in the hold of the ship he should have commanded; and the "imperfect understanding" of the signal that threw the line into confusion was due to princely prudence dictating a movement of his squadron to the rear. Floods of caricatures deluged Paris. They showed the Duc de Chartres in sailor's dress, with the psalm inscription: "*Mare vidit et fugit*," and with every other allusion to cowardice that malice could invent. His face, "carbuncle-studded," was greeted with mocking laughter at the Opera. "Monsieur," the King's brother, wrote a

song upon him; and every one, from Marie Antoinette downwards, sang about:

"Cherchant la toison fameuse,
Jason sur la mer orageuse
Se hasarda."

The Duc permitted himself to observe of a passing lady that her beauty was faded; "like your reputation, Monseigneur!" was the retort. De Maurepas heard that this heir of the House of Orléans wished to be made Admiral for this naval victory. He said that at last he had learnt what was meant by a naval victory. "Two squadrons come out of two opposite ports; there are manœuvres; cannons are fired, some masts knocked down, a few sails torn; then both squadrons retire; each claims to have remained mistress of the battlefield; both sing Te Deums; and the sea remains as salt as before."

Perhaps the final addition to the "confusion of confusions" bottled, as Carlyle says, within the Duc de Chartres, was made by de Maurepas; possibly it was due to the wit of Marie Antoinette, for assuredly it did not emanate from the brain of its ostensible author, Louis. In answer to his demand for the rank of Admiral, he received the following honour, published in the *Gazette de France*: "The King, to reward Monseigneur the Duc de Chartres for his services at sea has appointed him—Colonel of Hussars."

An appointment whose reason of selection reminds one of the honour paid by Catherine of Russia to the Princesse d'Ashkoff, her friend—or rival—in Court

circles. The Empress rewarded her feminine services by placing her, with the rank of a general, at the head of her Academy.

Thus ended the famous "descent upon England." The thirty-five thousand men remained in the camps of Paramé and Vaucieux until November; when they returned to fight imaginary battles in Paris. The French fleet, when it had repaired its injuries, sailed away to the West Indies in the hope of meeting some merchant vessels from the Antilles. Sixty French merchant ships had been left in St. Domingo when the men-of-war had been ordered to Brest; but before they could return to escort them no less than fifty had been snapped up by the "multitudes of British corsairs," as the resentful French history has it. It continues to complain that Britain gave France no chance at all; she never left her own commerce unprotected; and even when the French sent an escort to convoy home their own ships, they always had the bad luck to fall in with a superior British force and get taken; "which plunged in grief the inhabitants of Bordeaux, Nantes, St. Malo, and Havre de Grâce," it says piteously.

Louis XV. had said: "France will never get a navy, I believe"; and although vessels had been given voluntarily by rich ports to aid the dwindled sea forces, yet this drain by grasping Britain was reducing them to the former state of penury, in which the gift by Bordeaux, six years before, of a war vessel had been so welcome. Of this ship, launched with

such splendour at Bordeaux in 1772, there remained not even its name ; for it had been christened, with time-serving sycophancy, *La Comtesse du Barry*, and the times had not served at all.

Although the war against England had more the air of a naval farce (such as those upon the Opera stage, recommended by Sophie Arnould as useful study for de Boynes, First Lord of the French Admiralty) than of serious combat, that into which Austria rushed was an ominous reality. While the battle of Ushant was being fought, and the people of Paris were exercising their wits in suitable addresses to the Duc de Chartres, Marie Thérèse was in despair at the ruin brought upon her country by Joseph's action.

"The Prussians are in Bohemia . . . and now the
31 July, 1778. Emperor and his four Marshals, Prince Albert, Hadik, Lacy, and Laudon, have come to the conclusion that as the Saxons have joined the King [of Prussia] we are inferior in number by forty thousand men. They say that with our armies of one hundred and eighty thousand men we cannot act on the defensive ; cannot prevent the King from establishing himself in Bohemia or Moravia for the winter ; or ravaging and devastating our good provinces during the summer months, and taking from us all our resources in men, stores, and money. If these gentlemen had only said this in April, or even in May, we should not have let things go so far. . . . But then they played the



MARIE THÉRÈSE, EMPRESS OF AUSTRIA.

(*From the Portrait given by the Empress to the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau.*)

courtier, and now see what a state we are in; for they think of nothing less than abandoning Prague, and the whole of Bohemia, and retiring behind the Elbe. . . . And all this before we have received the slightest repulse!"

The Empress saw the same fate threaten her again as had overwhelmed her before; even the retreat was upon the same road to Kolin, "as in 1757, before the battle that saved Prague." The Saxons had joined her enemy; the Hanoverians were mustering at Mühlhausen; Hesse and other little princedoms were summoning their troops, all persuaded or purchased by Frederick the Great; "and we sit here with our arms folded."

The misery of her country, the success of her old and dreaded enemy—these were the reasons that led the Empress to put such pressure upon Marie Antoinette. "I beg of you to help Mercy to save your house and your brothers. I do not wish to drag the King [Louis] into this unhappy war, but only for him to make a show, to call out some regiments, to come to our aid in case the Hanoverians and others ally themselves with our enemies." So Marie Antoinette, broken-hearted at the misfortunes of her family, was forced by these woes to strain all the influence she had gained as Queen of France, in trying to save Austria from the evils brought upon it by the brother who was indeed only "playing his own game," as she had said with perfect truth.

Mercy's policy was peace at any price; and with

that view he contemplated the mediation of France. That alone with the weight of alliance could intervene and stay the disastrous advance of Prussia.

"But I shall have to lead that weak and timorous spirit, the Comte de Maurepas, by slow steps, . . . blindfolding him, so to speak, and taking him, without his seeing my guidance, so far on the road before he recognises whither he is going, that he will be too much compromised to retreat."

17 August, 1778.

The summer passed in these slow manœuvres. The Austrian and Prussian armies lay opposite each other, not moving until October, when the Prussians retreated. De Maurepas advanced no step, but evaded lightly every effort made to draw France into action; and inaction was natural to the character of Louis. He was so much occupied in finding little means of pleasing his wife that he could not think of the great ones. He disliked the Comtesse de Polignac, but he sent an express messenger to fetch her from the country when he found his wife in tears he knew no means to dry. He hated gambling, but he made a first attempt at faro to please her, to the astonishment of his Court.

Mercy said this was the greatest proof he could give of his desire to please his wife; but it was to be hoped that his complaisance would not lead him to repeat it, "for it would be dangerous and greatly to be deprecated, as the King is not at all a good loser, and his irritation draws him into regrettable explosions. The Queen agrees with me in this; and

I hope it will be another reason against this gambling, the fury for which has greatly lessened." The chief reason of this diminution was again the difficulty of finding a banker whose purse could support the honour. For in Paris, as in London (where the Princess Amelia gambled nightly at Marlborough House), faro was found too ruinous for any banker to continue long. "Faro (or Pharaoh) has had a short reign. The bankers find that all the calculated advantages of the game do not balance pinchbeck parolis and debts of honourable women." In Versailles, too, the same discovery was made. "Madame" observed to the bankers, with her true Piedmontese sharpness of notice: "Messieurs, they are cheating you pretty well;" and they replied gallantly: "Madame, we do not notice such things." But the cheating Duchesses, whose rank ensured them the privilege of sitting at the gaming table of the Queen, had to submit to a regulation that diminished their opportunities. A broad ribbon border was placed round the edge of the table; and stakes had thus to be placed beyond the graceful manipulation of casual fingers. With this double drawback, faro dwindled; and when the Normandy camp was well filled it ceased at Court, until such time as the defenders of their country returned to Paris.

But the active energies of Marie Antoinette must be employed, and in default of faro, there were fairs; where the Queen sold lemonade to her Court, and the ladies played at being saleswomen, at a cost to

the State of about 400,000 livres [£16,000]. Or there was a procession of masks organised to divert her, in which M. de Maurepas appeared as Cupid. Walpole says: "Maurepas was a short man, with a vulgar and inexpressive face, simple manners, and cold deportment, clothed in great dignity;" the suitability of clothing is suggestive in this connection. Madame de Maurepas was Venus, from similar reasons. The ministers were all present, de Vergennes with the world on his head, a map of America on his breast, and one of England upon his back. The octogenarian Maréchal de Richelieu appeared as Cephalus, and danced a minuet with the Maréchale de Mirepoix, who hid her seventy years and "troublesome nervous affection" under the guise of Aurora; for "she has read, but seldom shows it, and has perfect taste," but classic knowledge will betray itself even in the recognition of the Greek fret in a mere fender pattern. The Duc de Coigny appeared as Hercules; and the Duc de Lauzun, "*qui devient présomptueux et talon rouge quand il s'agit de succès féminins*," very suitably, as the Sultan; while all the Court pages were dressed, "*en jockeys.*" At one o'clock the Queen ended the Carnival, which had come to amuse her in her enforced absence from the Opera balls; and all the company partook of chocolate and ices.

There were daily receptions by the Queen at eleven o'clock; to which all the Court went without ceremony (and "much too carelessly dressed," said

Mercy), where all sorts of childish games were played. The nightly gambling recommenced, to amuse Marie Antoinette, with the King's consent and approval.

"The gaming-room was open to all without distinctions; rascals were introduced, and one was arrested who was caught passing a rouleau of counters as louis." [He was sent to the Bastille, but the titled *fripons* remained.] "Other very indecorous events occurred, which cannot fail to excite comment among the public, and will create the worst impression. The Queen lost 1,000 louis [£960], but regained 400 [£384] the evening before leaving Marly. Mesdames, who had been residing at their *château* Bellevue during the month of October, came to spend the day at Marly; and arrived when the reception was being held before luncheon. They showed plainly in their visages that they disapproved of this class of social gathering." Mesdames made the acid remarks that might have been expected from ladies whose standard of a Queen's Court was that of the dreary, silent, etiquette-ridden self-effacement of Marie Leczinska. "Monsieur" was the bearer of these strictures to Marie Antoinette; who received them "with much temper." However, no serious quarrel resulted. 17 November 1778.

In December the great preoccupation of the Empress and Mercy was that of arranging for the speedy transmission of the all-important news of the birth of the child. Marie Thérèse directed Mercy to have his letter all written in advance, just to fill in the

blanks with the date and the sex, and send the messenger with all haste, so that she might receive the news within eight days from the time of its despatch. Mercy laid his plans; and then found, to his vast vexation, that etiquette forbade his despatching a courier within forty-eight hours after the French messenger had left to convey the news officially to the Baron de Breteuil. The Comte de Vergennes was so wedded to this formality, which ensured the French Ambassador in Vienna first receiving the great news, that all Mercy's representations could obtain was permission for his courier to leave Paris after twenty-four hours had elapsed. Without a passport Mercy's messenger could not quit Paris; and he wrote to the Empress on 5 December that he was unable to promise her the news she so anxiously awaited, as etiquette was more important than humanity. He pointed out that the delay would not be much greater, for obviously it would be to the interest of the French messenger to make all possible speed; and his own letter would be able to give a report of the health of Marie Antoinette on the day following. "But after sending this courier, I shall have no means of communicating except by the ordinary post, for in all France there is no arrangement for despatching letters by express messengers."

The ordinary post, with its lack of privacy so recognised that it served to diffuse news as well as convey it, its delays, and its dangers, was never employed except as a vehicle of rumours that the

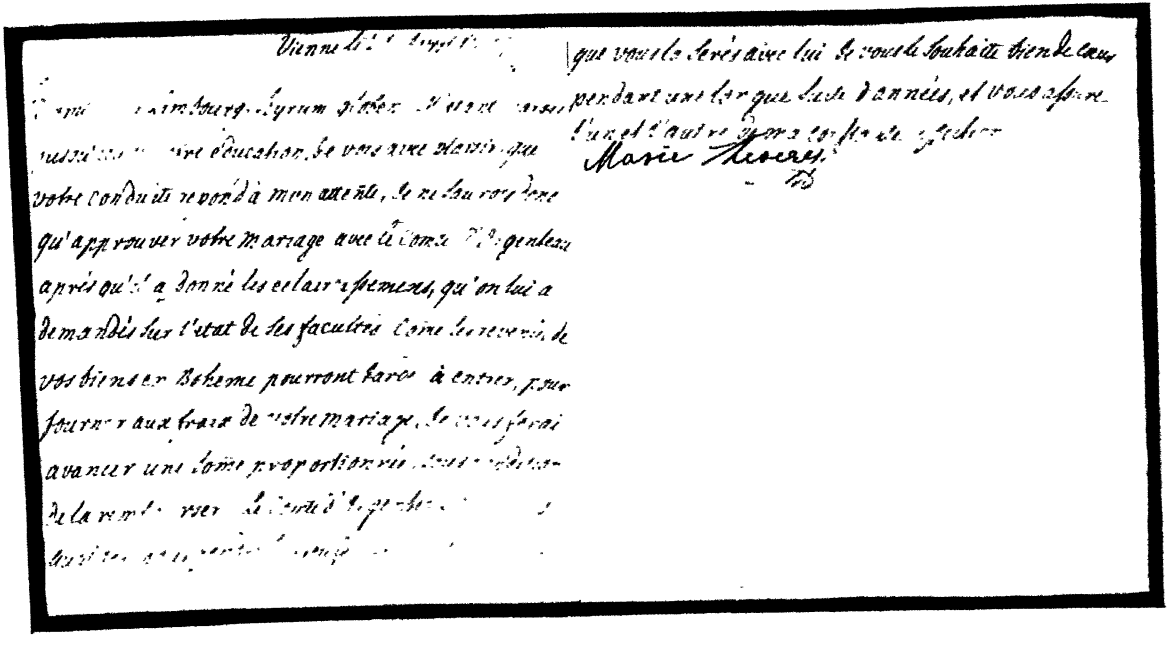
sender wished to publish. Then it had no equal as a means of percolation.

In anticipation of an heir to France, Marie Antoinette had begged her mother to be the godmother, as the King of Spain was to be the godfather; and all due State would be thus observed. She had asked her to name her proxy at the ceremony; and to send a list of names which her son should bear. All these State ceremonies were carried out by proxies. At Marie Antoinette's own marriage, her husband had been represented by her brother the Archduke Ferdinand, who kneeled at her side in the church of the Augustines on 19 April, in place of the Dauphin. Marie Thérèse had asked Mercy for his advice upon all ceremonial observances necessary, and it had been agreed that "Madame," as the lady of highest rank after the Queen, should represent the Empress. But the agitation consequent on Frederick's invasion of Bohemia, the outbreak of war, the danger of her son's life as well as throne, made her forget these matters, and she wrote to Mercy on 25 November that the whole thing had escaped her memory.

"If by good luck it had not come into my mind it would have been forgotten altogether." She enjoined upon Mercy to make all excuses, and convey her formal request for "Madame" to represent her at the christening; she sent also a list of presents "which you can add to, take away, or augment at your good pleasure. Give what sums you think right in money. Could you not do as Breteuil did

in Naples—turn your entertainment into a thank-offering, by freeing some unhappy prisoners, or giving dowries to some girls? I leave that in your hands. . . . The tablets of lacquer for Madame de Provence are not quite ready. I thought them more suitable than only the bracelet with my portrait, which cost 8,000 florins. . . . The bracelet with my monogram is for Madame de Guéménée; you can add a snuff-box or some other trifle you may procure in Paris, if it is necessary to increase this present. It did not seem to me correct to give a bracelet with my portrait to the Governess, as I am giving one to 'Madame.' There is a lady's snuff-box with my portrait, which you can give away or keep yourself as you think best; and one for a man, in green, with my monogram, which is also at your disposal. The rings are for the doctors; but in this, as in everything else, you need not keep to the list, but do exactly what you think best."

In this same letter she mentions the approaching marriage of a relation of the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, in whose welfare she was interesting herself. "I have seen M. d'Argenteau." [He was Joseph Louis Eugène, Comte d'Argenteau, head of the cadet branch of Argenteau d'Ochain, descended from Guillaume II. in 1453.] "It is enough for me that he belongs to you, and that you are interested in him, to make this affair one of importance to me. The parties interested have already seen each other, and it is an extremely suitable match. He could please any reasonable person; but she is very



LETTER OF MARIE THÉRÈSE.

To the Comtesse de Limburg-Styrum-Globen, on the occasion of her marriage with the Comte d'Argenteau.

(From the original document at the Chateau d'Argenteau.)

[Page 613.

ugly, short, fat, with neither complexion nor eyes. But her character is good, and she has wit. I could wish that her income were doubled, but at the present moment she has nothing but a little estate in Bohemia ; everything else belongs to her mother, who is perfectly mad. It must pass to her by law in due course."

The lady in question was the Comtesse de Limbourg-Styrum-Globen ; Marie Thérèse had been her guardian from her childhood and had educated her. The letter the Empress wrote on the occasion of this marriage is among the interesting papers that are reproduced from those in the possession of the Comtesse de Mercy-Argenteau. It runs : " Comtesse de Limbourg-Styrum-Globen. Having taken your education upon myself up to the present time, I see with pleasure that your conduct answers to my expectations. I could not, therefore, do otherwise than approve of your marriage with the Comte d'Argenteau ; after he has given the usual proofs required of the condition of his property. As it may be long before you realise the revenues from your estates in Bohemia, I will advance you a sum to defray the expenses of your marriage, proportionate to your requirements, on condition of it being repaid. The Comte d'Argenteau has all the qualities that should render a wife happy, and I hope that you will be happy with him. I hope for your welfare for many long years, and I assure you both of my unchanging affection.—Marie Thérèse."

A letter more business-like in its marriage congratulations could not easily be found.

CHAPTER XVI

The Birth of Marie Antoinette's Child—Admission of the Public—The Queen's Life Endangered—Action of Louis—The Public Expelled by Force—First Reception by "*Madame Fille du Roi*"—The Coalheavers and Fishwives—Plans of Education for "Little Madame"—The Etiquette of Royal Children—Jean Jacques Rousseau—The Results of his Teachings—Thanksgiving Offerings—The Queen at the Opera Ball—The Paris Gazettes

THE great news, so eagerly anticipated, was despatched by Mercy with the headline: "From the secretarial office of the ministry at Versailles, 20 December, at three-quarters of an hour after mid-day." But Heaven had not granted a Dauphin; and the announcement merely conveyed the fact that "a Princess has been born into the world at half-past eleven this morning." Poor little unwelcome Princess, she bore through all her childhood the melancholy of being a disappointment to France; and her sad, grave little face won her the name of "*Mousseline la Sérieuse.*" Mademoiselle Bertin says she was always "*grande dame, bien grande dame,*" but was never a child and never would be one. She was no disappointment to Marie Antoinette, who said, when first taking her

20 December, 1778.

in her arms: "Poor little thing, you were not wanted; but you will be my very own the more for that; a son would have belonged to the State."

That Mercy was able to record in his first despatch: "The Queen is as well as it is possible for her to be, and her august child, who is strong and healthy, is also wonderfully well," seems due rather to a miracle than to any disposition of nature. The arrangements for the birth of the child would be absolutely incredible if they were not so well authenticated. Custom, that tyranny of Courts, ordained that no barrier was to be placed against the free admission of as many of the public as could fight their way into the Queen's chamber. The public had been waiting for days for this opportunity. The staircases and landings of Versailles, always swarming with itinerant vendors of various wares, and obstructed by beggars who stoutly plied their trade within the Royal precincts, were packed with waiting throngs; and when the signal was given that the hour approached, they rushed trampling into the apartments of the Queen as into a public place. The rooms were packed in an instant so full that no one could move; the surging mobs were so disorderly and tumultuous that the screens round the bed of the Queen would have been flung down upon her by their pressure, had the King not taken the precaution in the night of fixing them with cords. Sweeps and fishwives (always privileged classes in Paris) clamoured and struggled; filthy children climbed to the top of pieces of furniture

that they might observe more at their ease; for they had wrestled their way in for a free spectacle, and thus intended to see it, without restraint and with the brutality of their nature. The mob was hanging on to the curtains, sitting on the statues, climbing on to the pictures; everywhere shouts, confused noises, and stench from dirty rags.

The shock of these appalling surroundings in which the Queen gave birth to her child, added to the fetid atmosphere of the apartment crammed with all the squalor from the gutters, nearly killed the young mother. There was a moment when it was feared she was dying. The doctor called for air, but every window was sealed and papered up throughout its whole length, leaving no crack for ventilation. All refused to leave the room, and lose the spectacle, although their presence was threatening the Queen's life, and their crowds stifling her. Louis, with the terror of her immediate death giving him desperate strength, pushed his way through the densely packed and gloating crowds; and forced open one of the sealed windows by an effort that seemed superhuman. The Princesse de Lamballe was carried out unconscious. The King's valets and ushers, with belated common sense, cleared the room by force. And the Queen returned from the gates of death.

But the anxiety and solicitude of Louis had beneficial effects upon him; the dull, feeble brain had been stimulated by stress of fear, and had inspired the instant physical effort whose strength had amazed

the spectators. Louis brightened with the happiness of fatherhood; he was absorbed in the little child, as Mercy records, and devoted himself to his wife with all the tenderness of which he was capable. He sat by her bedside and wrote a letter to Vienna; he thought of many things to please her, and even commanded that perfect quiet was to be maintained. He spoke to Mercy on the subject and was convinced by him that the Queen needed absolute quiet and repose; so he ordered that the Queen's apartment should be closed to all, except the members of the Royal family, the ladies-in-waiting, the Superintendent (Princesse de Lamballe), the Comtesse de Polignac, the doctors, and the Abbé de Vermond. To this order may be attributed the fact of Marie Antoinette's recovery, for it was strictly observed, "in spite of the clamour of those who have the entry at Court and of the ladies of the Palace."

Where privacy was a thing unknown, the presence of a mere sixteen or so persons was accounted absolute repose. But Marie Antoinette was full of care for those whose duties required them to be present. Custom insisted that she should be watched at nights by a very numerous suite. She minimised the rigour of their vigil by commanding "enormous armchairs with adjustable backs." In these all the ladies "watched" as comfortably as in their beds. Custom also required that the chief doctor, the chief surgeon, the chief apothecary, and the chief officers of the buttery should watch for nine nights without retiring.

They had already been on duty for fifteen days, held in readiness in an adjoining room. And as nothing could be omitted that custom prescribed, it was necessary to arrange for some one to watch the Royal infant night and day for the first three years of its life. The Princesse de Guéménée, as Royal governess, was one of the ladies honoured with this privilege; and she watched by having her bed placed beside a glass panel, over which, when the ceremony of the child's dressing was finished, she drew a thick curtain, and slept.

"*La petite Madame*," or "Madame, the King's daughter," as the little Marie Thérèse Charlotte was called, to distinguish her from the wife of "Monsieur," held her first reception on the day of her birth; and all the Court went to pay visits of ceremony. Also all the Ambassadors paid their respects, including Mercy, who told the Empress that her granddaughter had "charming and regular features in her tiny face, great eyes, a very prettily-shaped mouth, and a complexion that is evidence of the best of health." Mercy obtained the privilege of seeing the Royal infant daily, that he might observe if all due care was exercised by its nurses; and he remained two-thirds of each day in attendance near the Queen. He rendered strict justice to the considerate behaviour of the Royal family, "not even the Comte d'Artois has given any sign of rejoicing that the Royal child is a Princess;" and Marie Antoinette had shown no disappointment that it was not a boy. Even the Abbé de Vermond had relaxed

his dignity so far as to unbend in "amusing readings" for the Queen. This concession pleased the King; and to Vermond's joy he was at last the recipient of a speech from Louis, the first in eight years. These words were only in reference to the desire of the courier Caironi to see the little Princess; but the gratification of being addressed at all was sufficient.

Everywhere joy was evident and devotion to the Queen. "More than two hundred persons of quality, who usually reside in Paris, have come to Versailles and established themselves here; so that there are no more lodgings obtainable and the price of provisions has trebled." In all the churches of Paris there were thanksgiving services; there were illuminations and fireworks, fountains flowing with wine, and free distributions of bread and sausages. All theatres gave free entertainment to the public, especially to those worthy members of it, the coalheavers and fishwives, who were as keen sticklers for their precedence among the industries of Paris as any courtiers at Versailles. The Comédie Française gave a performance, free to all; but they omitted to reserve the Royal boxes for the *charbonniers* and *poissardes*. When the fishwives arrived—as the aristocracy of the markets, they came late—they found the Queen's box occupied by earlier comers. There was a tumult, and such uproar that a council of theatre managers, hastily summoned to examine into the etiquette of *poissarde* precedence, decided to offer apologies and erect special seats. And the fish-ladies filed in to take their places in rows

under the Queen's box; while the coalheavers were treated with similar respect upon the opposite side of the house, with special benches in the neighbourhood of the King's box; and one of their body, with blackened face, read out the latest bulletin of the Queen's health.

The chief thought of Marie Antoinette, and her chief subject of discussion with Mercy, was the best means of educating her little daughter, "Madame Fille du Roi." She had long determined that her child should not suffer from the neglect enveloped in slavish adulation, that had stunted Louis' mental powers; and permitted him to grow to man's age with what feeble faculties he possessed dwarfed and untrained. The childhood of Louis was an object-lesson to her of all that she intended to avoid for her own children. Hedged with sycophants, flattered as if divinely gifted, poor uncouth Louis passed twenty-five years of life before he attempted to plumb the depths of his own ignorance. The feeble spark of wits, tended diligently by his wife through eight years, was now burning, if still with flickering flame. Louis, from henceforth, tried his best to learn; was led on from his map-drawing to take interest in geography; from the aimless hammering of iron to the skilful manufacture of locks. Marie Antoinette resolved that her own children should not be submitted to such a slavery of the mind. Mercy described her "wise and well-considered plan" to the Empress. One point she had determined,

25 January, 1779.

to cut down all the customary addresses to Royal children, whose etiquette was as formal as that of reigning sovereigns.

So rigid was this etiquette of address that it was not omitted even after death. It is said that although Marie Antoinette could prevent formal harangues to her living children, she was powerless to prevent them being addressed to her son (the elder Dauphin) after his death. When he died in 1789, a deputation came to pay their last respects to his body, lying in state at Meudon. The Duc de Brézé, as their speaker and Master of the Ceremonies, bowed to the corpse and addressed it in all form: "Monseigneur, a deputation from the Three Estates of the Realm has come to wait upon you;" and food was placed beside the little dead body at the hours when the Dauphin used to eat. His coffin filled the last vacant niche in the vault of the Kings of France.

Mercy described further the plan that the Queen had drawn up for her children: "All representations of grandeur are to be removed from the sight of the Royal child from the first day; for they, when studied in early youth, tend to place great obstacles in the way of education, and prevent the progress of right training." Marie Antoinette had such detestation of the trappings of Royalty that she was never so happy as in the white cotton dress and straw hat she used to wear at the Petit Trianon. She would rather spend a day fishing in the lake or milking the cows, than receive her Court at Versailles. She had observed

that a child brought up in the traditions of the Bourbons—who had never known any other life than that of a Royal Court, nor breathed any other atmosphere than that of State derived from centuries of kingship—developed into a lout with a taste for ironmongery, and the mind and manners of a plough-boy. She proposed to follow a different course, and, by treating a child as a human being, train him first to rule himself and then to rule a kingdom. "Kings are Gods upon earth" had been Louis' copy-book maxim; but Marie Antoinette would remove from her children's sight even the insignia of Royalty, lest they dream themselves of different clay. It is strange to recall that the imbecility, increased in Louis XVI. by the deference of a Court that removed from him all experience of realities, was induced in his son, the nominal Louis XVII., by the brutality of a cordwainer, who thrust the realities of life upon him with blows. The last sight of her child, through the chink of the prison door, was to Marie Antoinette a revelation that he was his father over again, already with the Bourbon corpulence at eight years old, and with the light of his intelligence extinguished.

The proposed plans of education for her Royal grandchild did not meet with any approval from the Imperial Marie Thérèse. "I do not agree in the least that all etiquette should be struck out of the plan of education for the children of our rank (but all luxury, effeminacy, and exaggerated

Vienna, 13 January, 1779.

service). The present gospel according to Rousseau, that renders people boors by excess of liberty, does not please me at all; and I can see no good in it, but just the opposite. Without carrying it to the point of fostering pride, it is necessary for them to be accustomed from infancy to State displays, to avoid the multitude of awkward errors that result inevitably when the Sovereign and his family do not distinguish themselves in matters of due State and precedence. It is an essential point, especially with regard to the French nation, which is as lively as it is frivolous."

The philosopher of the Château d'Ermenonville, who had as much aversion from Voltaire as Voltaire had from him, had died within thirty-two days of his rival; the two chief exponents of the art of self-advertisement, examples of the vanity of pomp and the vanity in trifles, passing from the stage of France in the same year. Jean Jacques Rousseau was disliked by those who took exception to his method of providing for his illegitimate children; by the patriots, who knew he drew a pension from England, and scoffed at his pretence that he did not spend it; and by those of the Court who did not sympathise with his opinions on nature. Madame du Deffand wrote of this philosopher, detested by Marie Thérèse: "The spectacle that this man makes of himself here is on a par with those of Nicolet [a Boulevard theatre for pantomime]."

The new philosophy of nature, equality, and simplicity was undermining the principles of monarchy;

but the Prince de Ligne, who had offered a refuge to Rousseau in Flanders, wrote in after-life: "No one can affirm that philosophy caused this revolution. I have seen no philosopher; only great nobles who have made themselves commoners [*roturiers*], and common people who have made themselves great nobles." Those philosophers he dismissed with the phrase: "*les fats ne font pas de révolutions.*"

The whole of France was playing with fire; all were busily destroying without attempting to replace; and to all a revolution seemed so impossible that they acted with great enjoyment the parts of revolutionaries. Religion was held beneath the consideration of a man of quality; who yet could narrate seriously an interview with the devil, or address respectful prayers to a toad in a crystal bowl, and question it upon the future life. The maddest follies were matters of daily routine; luxury and limitless extravagance were the accompaniments of avowals of Rousseau's doctrine of a simple life. A great noble kept open house for all that wished to enter, to dine or sup or gamble; the Duc de Choiseul at Chanteloup received all who came, with a hospitality that never dreamt of a reckoning. The daily bread bill at Chanteloup was 300 livres [£12]; thirty sheep a month was a usual item in the household account. The model farm, the hobby of the Duchesse de Choiseul, was kept on the same costly scale, with special herds of cows kept in splendid marble stalls, and a retinue of servants to wait upon them. The

love of simplicity and nature was considered proved by the fact that the Duchesse de Choiseul had her finest sheep brought into her drawing-room. No reference was made to the ostentation that prepared these Arcadian pleasures.

The desire of Marie Antoinette for simplicity of manners was no pose, but was classed as such by those to whom pose was nature. 25 January, 1779. Mercy recorded that great efforts had been made to diminish the swarms of useless servants, whose mere number was considered evidence of State; even though they were a poverty-stricken multitude, whose wages were paid in haphazard fashion if luck at cards produced a temporary surplus. This retrenchment was the work of Mercy, who pressed it earnestly upon the King, and mentioned with satisfaction, not unmingled with astonishment, that all his suggestions had been carried out "without a complaint from one single person." The ceremonial addresses to the unconscious infant, "Madame Fille du Roi," were entirely done away; ambassadors and foreign ministers might go to pay their Court to her, but singly and on condition they forebore to call in a solemn diplomatic body. All etiquette in her little Court was abolished; all superfluous attendance by "the crowd of useless and embarrassing servants who make such a show at this Court." But the little Madame had still eighty attendants in her severely diminished household, whose sole duties were to wait on her small Royal person.

Thanksgiving offerings were to be made, although for a mere Princess; and etiquette considered that Heaven deserved them only when it granted a Dauphin. The King gave the Queen 102,000 livres [£4,080], to be used as she wished; and to one hundred poor maids, chosen by the priests of each parish, were given dowries and, by consequence, husbands, each bride receiving 500 francs [£20] and her own and her husband's wedding garments. A further benefaction was contingent upon these marriages, for the Queen undertook to pay the wages of such monthly nurses as were found necessary in consequence of them, with the stipulation that if the brides were prepared to nourish their own children they would be paid 15 livres [12*s.*] a month; but if that maternal duty were given to strangers, then they would only get 10 livres a month [8*s.*]. All these couples stood in rows in Notre Dame, to receive the nuptial blessing from the Archbishop of Paris, at the time that the Queen came in State to offer her own prayers. The rest of the money released many prisoners for debt; and donations were made to the hospitals. In Versailles itself the King gave 1,000 louis [£960] to the poor; and a further thank-offering of 100,000 livres was made, through the Comte de Maurepas, but this did not go to the poor, it liquidated some of the Queen's gambling debts. Marie Antoinette diligently kept a record of her daily gains and losses, but had never added up the sums. The Abbé de Vermond made out these accounts, the result of which astonished her.

In 1778 she had lost more than 14,000 louis [£13,440]; she had won 6,494 louis [£6,234 4*s.* 10*d.*], and thus her net loss was 7,556 louis [£7,253 15*s.* 3*d.*] on the year, an amount that startled and alarmed her. She resolved immediately to diminish her stakes and to be far more economical in future; this resolution was strengthened by her reception in Paris, which had not been of such warmth as was expected.

Paris was suffering from an increase in the price of bread, the war was draining its resources; the inhabitants of the seaports were ruined by the loss of trade and the capture of the merchant ships; and England had taken St. Lucia, St. Pierre, and Miquelon. The counter-balancing news did not arrive till March, that on 28 January, 1779, the Duc de Lauzun, with a squadron of two men-of-war, two frigates, three sloops of war and one schooner had taken Senegal, the fort of which was defended by four Englishmen, "three of whom were invalids . . . and one marched out with the honours of war" (says Madame du Deffant). Paris, therefore, had received Marie Antoinette with a few loyal shouts, but for the most part in dead silence, whose menace had held no meaning to the Court. The discontent did not cause the pleasures of the Court to lessen, only to be hidden more carefully; and the first night that the Queen again sought the amusement of the Opera ball passed entirely without notice from the eager gazettes. Mercy mentions in his letter of 16 February that the King and Queen went together to this ball,

so well masked and disguised that no one knew they had been present; even he would have declared the expedition had not taken place if the Queen herself had not told him.

The gazettes, for which Marie Thérèse subscribed that she might know even the gossip of Paris about her daughter, brought her so much incredible news that she asked explanations from Mercy. In answer to a letter from the Empress, enclosing a little sheet full of scandal, Mercy wrote: "I do not hesitate to affirm that there is not one single statement in it that has a particle of truth or even its semblance. These absurd productions do not sell in Paris; they are intended for the foreign market, and are written by wretched hacks who are forced into this trade by hunger, and, for very little pay, compose these anecdotes whose absurdity is so obvious to any one living on the spot that he could not be misled." When these snappers-up of scandal had a real incident upon which to build, the edifice was remarkable.

17 March, 1779.

Mercy tells the true version of an anecdote, widely spread and highly coloured, that appears under various guises in all the memoirs. Marie Antoinette, having enjoyed the first ball at the Opera, to which she had gone with the King, wished to go to another. His Majesty agreed, and then changed his mind, for he had been so much bored by the first ball that he had found nothing amusing in it but some *pierrots*; but he desired that the Queen should go with her lady-in-waiting, the Princesse

d'Hénin (wife of the insignificant little Prince d'Hénin, called "*le nain des princes*," by a play upon his title. He was younger brother of the Prince de Chimay, and nephew of Madame de Mirepoix). They left Versailles in the secrecy that masks ensured successfully—by making all ladies of the Court indistinguishably alike; drove to Paris to the hôtel of the King's Chief Equerry, the Duc de Coigny, and thence drove off in a hired carriage to the ball. But the carriage, being old and worn out, broke down in a street some distance from the theatre. The Queen was forced to alight; they could not stand in the street, so went into the first shop near, a silk merchant's. Her Majesty remained masked, and did not speak; and as it was no uncommon thing for similar accidents to happen, nothing would have been known but for the amusement of the Queen at the close of the adventure. The carriage was too old to mend; it was too late to obtain a fresh one, so a hackney-coach was called, and the Queen and the Princesse d'Hénin drove to the ball in this vehicle. As it was the first time she had any experience of a Paris *fiacre*, she mentioned how amusing it had been to her to find herself in one; and the story spread rapidly. Mercy does not explain how the adventure became known, nor comment upon the embroideries, at first harmless, then highly scandalous, that were served up by the newsmongers, and turned the accident into an assignation.

CHAPTER XVII

Justifications of the Powers—The Siege of Gibraltar —Spain declares War against England—Marie Antoinette has the Measles—Her four Nurses—Comments of the Court—Pretensions of the Nurses and Scandal—Convalescence of the Queen —At Trianon—Intrigues in her Absence—Plan of Campaign against England—Lafayette and Paul Jones, the Buccaneer—De Maurepas and Marie Antoinette—Arrogance of the Duc de Guines—Trouble in Ireland—The Temptation of Louis.

IN 1779, while Opera balls and similar entertainments were occupying the Court to the exclusion of everything else, war was raging in every part of the world. Slowly, reluctantly, Spain had joined France, pressed thereto by force of the Family Compact ; and also by the hope of regaining Gibraltar. Ten days before the battle of Blenheim the rock had been seized by Rooke ; it had been confirmed to England by the Peace of Utrecht (surely the only peace negotiated by a poet), as part of the spoil of a war that had cost us sixty-nine millions—a war that had been undertaken to exclude the Bourbons from the throne of Spain, and had left them more firmly seated there than ever. Charles III. was now the Bourbon King of Spain, the great-grandson of Louis XIV., and cousin

of Louis XV. As Gibraltar had been wrested from Spain while his father, Phillip V., was King, it was filial as well as patriotic feeling that prompted its recovery. The first sign, therefore, that Spain had joined the Powers arrayed against England was the siege of Gibraltar; the second was the publication of a *Mémoire Justificatif* explaining its reasons. Each of the three countries concerned published a similar manifesto; Louis XVI. and Charles III. detailed their lofty and virtuous sentiments; and Spain, in especial, laid stress upon the statement that England had opened and destroyed Spanish letters found on *paquebots*. Over-scrupulousness in dealing with correspondence was not observed, even in times of peace, in Bourbon-governed lands; but the invasion of its privacy by England was an insult that could not be endured. It was by a similar seizure of letters that the first knowledge reached England of the schemes of Holland against her; the plan of the secret alliance between Holland and America, drawn up in September 1778, was discovered on board one of these packet-boats. Our answer to the French and Spanish manifestoes was the work of Gibbon, the historian, whose Justification of England was a memoir as weighty as his own person. But all three Mémoires were quite superfluous; each country was too firmly convinced of its own justice to read the other's justification.

The combined fleets of Spain and France numbered sixty-six sail of the line, besides frigates and small

vessels; and the great siege of Gibraltar commenced with every hope of success. Spain blockaded it by land, and the united fleets by sea; and they endeavoured to reduce the garrison by starvation. The British fleet numbered in all thirty-eight ships, and to re-victual Gibraltar against such odds seemed impossible. But Rodney set out with twenty-one ships of the line, and was aided by that good luck to which French histories ascribe all British success. He sailed on 8 January, captured twenty-one Spanish sail and their escort the *Guipuscoa* (as an interlude on the voyage out), took the French vessel *Protée;* and re-victualled Gibraltar on 13 February.

Every morning for more than three years King Charles III. asked upon waking: "Is it taken?" and every morning he said perseveringly: "It will be soon." It was well for King Charles that he took no Isabella vows, for as he did not die till 1788 he would have been even more in need of a laundress than she was. Eliott and his men lived on puddings made of hair powder and similar ingenious articles of diet; and refused to yield Gibraltar even to the Comte d'Artois, although he left off dancing on the tight-rope on purpose to come and take it.

But the Court paid no heed to the war convulsing Europe, for Marie Antoinette had the measles. Mercy tells the tale, with much reluctance, for he knows that the Empress will not approve of the selection of the Queen's nurses. There were four nurses, and they took possession of the

15 April, 1779.

Queen's bedroom from seven o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night, and never left it except for their meals. They were devoted watchers, unceasing in their attentions—but they were the Duc de Coigny, the Duc de Guines, the Comte Esterhazy, and the Baron de Besenval. The King was forbidden to enter his wife's room, for fear of infection; the ladies-in-waiting were forbidden to appear; the ladies of the Palace were also excluded. "This excited much murmuring against these four gentlemen." Even the Abbé de Vermond and Mercy found it difficult to see the Queen for a moment without her guardian nurses, who grew so arrogant in their indiscreet pretensions that they declared they would "watch" the Queen during the hours of the night as well. Manners were of considerable licence in those days. When the Abbé de Vermond received visitors in his bath, exception was taken only by bishops, who thought it disrespectful from a man whose calling was, ostensibly, that of the cloth; when the Princesse de Guéménée, in her bath, received the Duc de Choiseul, no exception was taken at all. But the idea of these four courtiers—men with titles but without reputations—as night-nurses of Marie Antoinette scandalised Mercy.

"It is true that the King approved;" but his Majesty's approval merely showed Louis to be even less fitted for his duty as husband than had been hoped. Mercy resolved to prevent it at all hazards. He sent for Lassone, the Queen's doctor, "but he is always feeble and trembling, and dare not assert himself

in support of the powers that his position gives. At last I raised such a disturbance . . . that it was decided these gentlemen should leave the Queen's room at eleven at night and not return till the next morning."

The presence of these four men (of whom two were of exceptional renown in vice) gave rise to endless scandals. Mercy mentions that the chief discussion among those ladies of the Court who were excluded from the presence of the Queen was, which four of them would be selected for exclusive attendance upon the King when *he* should be ill, and his wife forbidden to enter his room. Marie Antoinette had absolutely interdicted the King from coming to see her; and then, with perfectly feminine inconsistency, had been very angry with him for staying away. The four loyal gentlemen harped upon this string; and criticised their King's obedience to his wife, until they worked Marie Antoinette into much indignation against her husband for having done exactly what she had told him. "I trembled to think what consequences might result from such malicious mischief-making; and on the tenth day the Abbé de Vermond and I suggested to the Queen to write a few friendly lines to the King. This suggestion was at first accepted and then rejected with extreme bitterness. I admit that the credit is due to the Abbé de Vermond of having finally persuaded the Queen to write a few words, saying that she had suffered a great deal, but her chief grief was that her illness would deprive her, for a few days longer still, of the pleasure

of embracing the King. This note had all the effect I had hoped; the King was overjoyed to receive it; he replied instantly with much tenderness, and the correspondence was maintained almost daily. This has made a great sensation at Versailles, and at once the scandalous remarks ceased."

The King desired to see his wife, even if with the distance between them that the fear of measles enjoined; and Marie Antoinette arranged an interview. She went out on to a little balcony that overlooked a small private court. The King went into the court at a given hour and remained about fifteen minutes, "talking tenderly and amicably" to his wife. Louis was the only member of the Royal family who did not see the Queen during her illness. "Madame" called frequently, and the Comte d'Artois was there nearly all day, "adding his petulance to the disorder of the Queen's society." The Comtesse de Polignac, however, had measles at the same time as Marie Antoinette, who, in her absence, had to content herself with the Princesse de Lamballe. Mercy writes with great relief when all the Court left for Trianon, to pass the days of the Queen's convalescence there, "although these four personages have followed her Majesty thither; but as all the Court is present, there is no longer the same danger . . . and, thanks to Heaven, this vexatious period has ended with far less mischief than I feared."

The time at Trianon passed happily. Marie Antoinette's health was completely restored by a

regimen of asses' milk ; her spirits by exercise, flattery, and faro ; and her complexion by judicious treatment. She became "reasonably fat," and was quite content with life in the absence of Louis : until she found that he supported her own absence with such phlegmatic indifference that it did not occur to him to come and see her, even when he was notified that, all infection having ceased, he was at liberty to do so. The mental apathy of Louis, quickened though it had been by recent stimulus, was still so dense, his mind so inert, that it did not transform wishes into action. On the first evening of Marie Antoinette's official recovery she expected her husband to dinner, but although he felt sincere affection for his wife it did not carry him to the Trianon ; and "Monsieur," the King's brother, arrived alone. Such indifference of feeling, shown so openly, intensely piqued and mortified the Queen ; and all the Court and the whole town marvelled at the sluggish husband. Mercy implored Marie Antoinette to hide all resentment and appear to notice nothing ; and on her return to Versailles to adopt a friendly, unruffled tone towards her husband, as if she had not noticed any omission of courtesy. This was done, and with the best results ; "all was just the same as before, the King more sweet and more attentive than ever." It was merely when she was out of his presence that Louis forgot his wife.

To Mercy's knowledge of the methods of this Court it was quite clear that the illness and consequent

absence of Marie Antoinette would be seized as opportunity for what he terms "subterranean" intrigues, whose object was Louis. It had been impossible, even for Mercy, to watch over the morals of both Sovereigns; and in his daily guardianship of the Queen, the care of the King had necessarily to be omitted. On the re-union of their Majesties, his instant endeavour was to trace the effects of intrigues, of whose existence he had no doubt, and to find out how far Louis had been led astray—firstly in politics, secondly in morals.

Marie Antoinette discovered the former and Mercy the latter attempts upon the virtue of the King; but as they were prepared for them the shock was not great. 17 May, 1779.

De Maurepas had diligently instilled into Louis that in so critical a condition of the kingdom it would be unwise to listen to any other advice than his own. With the Queen removed (by the happy accident of measles) from the discussions of State affairs, these discussions became almost a monologue for de Maurepas; for silent, unready Louis did not easily discuss anything. The minister was therefore able to continue his policy of fostering republican sentiment without any unwelcome questions as to its ultimate end from the sharp-witted Imperialist, Marie Antoinette. Lafayette was in Paris, and Paul Jones, the buccaneer; and great swelling plans of an expedition against England were fermenting.

Lafayette was born 1 September, 1757, and was at

this time twenty-two years of age—a young man irradiated with the glory of active service in the American War, and the distinction of having demanded no pecuniary equivalent for such glory. He planned a descent upon the coast of England, whose plunder should aid him in despatching more contributions to the Americans. Paul Jones, the Scottish corsair, was born at Selkirk in 1736, and his name spread terror in all seaports of Great Britain and Ireland; for it was immaterial to him in what country's service he fought, as long as he was enabled to injure England. He first appears as the champion of republican independence, and did deeds of valour for the Americans, and Congress awarded him a gold medal; he then fought for feudal monarchy, and won so much distinction under French colours that Louis XVI. presented him with a sword of honour and the cross of military merit; he then upheld barbaric despotism, and entered into the service of Russia; and finally he solicited a command in the imperial army of Austria—which he did not obtain.

The plans, as arranged in May 1779, included as active leaders both Paul Jones and Lafayette; the one to command the squadron, the other the troops after landing in England. All was excitement and interest; officers of every age and rank rushed to Lafayette to offer their services, for France was full of idle, eager swords; and by a curious coincidence the date of Mercy's letter (17 May, 1779) is the same as that of Benjamin Franklin's letter from Passy,

in which he laments the superfluity of French officers in America, who were so grievously embarrassing Congress by their multitude that they had to be shipped, expensively, back to France again. The Peace of Teschen had been signed on 6 May, between Austria and Prussia, which put an end to the Bavarian war and its martial opportunities. But there was always England to fight ; and Lafayette was assembling his troops for the attack. De Maurepas forbade Lafayette to speak to Marie Antoinette upon the subject of his expedition, lest she should again meddle in politics ; for any interest in State affairs was unsuited to the daughter of the great Empress. But Lafayette did reveal everything to the Queen, even the detail of de Maurepas' restriction ; and she, in great irritation against the old minister, told Mercy, who proceeded to lay bare the threads of the intrigue and show the Queen that they were the logical results of her treatment of measles.

If she had not insisted upon the Duc de Guines being one of her sick-nurses, he would not have become so inflated with conceit as to boast to the Duc de Coigny of favours received ; and de Coigny would not have resented the pretence by the indiscretion of quarrelling with him. Had there been no quarrel and no arrogance of rival nurses, de Maurepas might have forgotten his hatred of de Guines, who, accused of smuggling and of using his ambassadorial information for gambling on the London Stock Exchange, had never succeeded in proving his innocence of these

charges by the skill with which he played the harp. By her own conduct she had given de Maurepas a weapon and he had used it. Mercy added a few of the Court comments upon the four nurses, to which the Queen listened with serious attention; and she promised amendment—more thought and less dissipation. Mercy then took the opportunity of impressing upon her that the offer by Frederick the Great to act as peace-maker between France and England was prompted by the insidious intention of injuring the Franco-Austrian alliance; and the name of "the monster" acted, as usual, as a spur to her love of her family.

The war that had so overwhelmed her mother ceased, but left legacies of ill-health to both sons of the Empress, who had suffered unaccustomed fatigues and hardships. Maximilian had been very ill, and the Empress had written, with great simplicity, to Marie Antoinette: "He takes remedies inside and out with such sweetness and evenness of temper, never complaining, never even bored, that I confess I should not have the same patience. . . . It is touching to see him." Marie Antoinette, conscience-stricken with recollections of measles and her own escape from boredom at the expense of scandal, wrote in reply: "It is indeed rare to have so much reason and patience at his age." (He was one year younger than herself.) The Empress had asked Mercy to give her some information upon the leading surgeons of Paris. He names five, but says: "It is well known that for many years past the science of surgery has retrograded

in this country, instead of advancing. . . . Search would be better made in England."

But England had need of all her own surgeons. News travelled slowly, but yet fast enough to fill the country with dread of what a day might bring forth. It was known that the fleet of France, refitted after the battle of Ushant, would sail on its mission of destruction in June; but its destination was unknown. Paul Jones, the fierce and able sea-captain, was equipping his ship, *Bon-Homme Richard*; and he was no admiral of the calibre of de Chartres. The armies of France, raging for employment, were only waiting for the Channel to dry up to devastate the whole of Great Britain. Spain was supposed to be fitting out an Armada that might have better luck than its predecessor; and was expecting daily to enter Gibraltar. With America, France, and Spain in open hostility, and Holland a treacherous neutral, giving secret aid to all enemies, a fresh foe was discovered—Ireland.

Walpole wrote: "This day se'night there was a great alarm about Ireland—which was far from being all invention, although not an absolute insurrection as was said." The Court, in order to break up the volunteer army established by the Irish themselves, endeavoured to persuade them to enlist in the militia. The experiment was tried "in Lady Blayney's county of Monaghan," but resulted in indignant rejection. "They said they had great regard for Lady Blayney and Lord Clermont, but to

5 June, 1779.

act under them would be to act under the King, and that was by no means their intention. . . . You will not collect from this that our prospect clears up. I fear there is not more discretion in the treatment of Ireland than of America. The Court seems to be infatuated. . . . A majority [in Parliament] that has lost thirteen provinces by bullying and vapouring and the most childish menaces will be a brave counter-match for France, Spain, and a rebellion in Ireland! And they are so pitifully mean as to laugh at Doctor Franklin who has such thorough reason to sit and laugh at them."

But France did not seize the chance in Ireland; and the design of an Irish republic under the French directory did not ripen till seventeen years later. There seemed more glory to be won by the easier capture of the barren Rock of Gibraltar; and when waiting to hear that the French had landed in Ireland, the news, fragmentary, incoherent, but ominous, reached London that a great attack was intended.

Walpole heard the flying rumours: "Behold a Spanish war! Beauveau" [brother of the juvenile septuagenarian Maréchale de Mirepoix, son of the Prince de Craon, one of the greatest nobles at Court, and yet an honest soldier] "is going, they know not whither, at the head of twenty-five thousand men, with three lieutenant-generals. The Duke of Richmond says the Brest fleet has certainly sailed, and had got the start of ours by twelve days; that M. de Beauveau was on board, with a large sum

16 June, 1779.

of money and with white and *red* cockades. . . . He has heard that the Prince de Beauveau has said he was going on an expedition that would be glorious in the eyes of posterity. I asked if that might not mean Gibraltar ? "

But subjects of greater personal interest than Gibraltar were in question. Faithful to his self-imposed task of investigating the machinations against the virtue of Louis (that would be as fatal to the interests of Marie Antoinette as a national bankruptcy) Mercy discovered his suspicions to have been well founded. While the Queen was at the Trianon various attempts had been made, but they met with such absolute impassiveness, such lack of recognition that there was any temptation at all, that the tempters had the mortification of doubting whether Louis even understood that he had been tempted. Marie Antoinette had so long ceased to consider such a possibility, that it needed much plain speaking on the part of Mercy to arouse her to the fact that such endeavours had been made in her absence. She resolved to accompany the King everywhere in future, even on the little hunting parties that pleased Louis greatly and bored her equally ; and she told Mercy that if she discovered the base villains who had so dared, she would make an example of them, whoever they might be, and overwhelm them in open ignominy and disgrace. That Louis had not been quite as blind to the futile intrigue as had been imagined was seen from a remark he made to his wife in conversation.

17 June 1779.

He said that she was the only woman who had ever stirred a feeling or a sensation in him; and he was ready to swear this. The Queen concluded from this declaration that Louis not only was aware of the attempts, but suspected that she was equally well acquainted with them. In his complaisance Louis now formed the habit of spending some evenings with her in the society of the Comtesse Jules de Polignac, as he knew that nothing would please her so much as some such proof of favour to her friend.

An even greater proof was given, the bestowal of which caused much jealousy; for although the Comtesse Jules seldom asked a "useful grace" for herself, she had a circle of grasping relatives whose hands were always empty and outstretched. The Duc de Villeroy (brother of the Maréchale de Luxembourg) was on the point of retiring from his command, one of the four chief military appointments at Court. It was usual in such cases—as all appointments were gifts of favour, not rewards of capacity—to permit the retiring officer to name his successor. De Villeroy chose the Duc de Lorges, the son of the Duc de Civrac (formerly Marquis de Durfort, Ambassador to Vienna).

This selection was considered so suitable that no voice was raised against it; even the Queen had consented, when fresh arrangements threw every one into a fury. The favourite Comtesse Jules de Polignac had a daughter whom she was about to marry to the Comte de Gramont. (This daughter, Comtesse de Gramont,

was married at eleven years of age, survived the Revolution, married her own daughter to Lord Ossulston, Earl Tankerville's son, and died in Edinburgh in 1803). The Comte de Gramont was the son of the Comtesse of that name (whose refusal to sit beside Madame du Barry had occasioned banishment and disgrace by Louis XV.): and nephew of the Duc de Gramont ("an inconsiderable person whom nature had intended for a hairdresser"); but he was only about twenty years old, and even the petitioner felt the absurdity of the demand she made upon the Queen, to appoint her young son-in-law to one of the chief offices of the Court. However, the request was granted, to the vast indignation of the de Civracs, who felt that their long connection with the Courts of Louis XV. and XVI., their services in connection with Marie Antoinette's marriage, the friendship of Marie Thérèse and of Madame Victoire (Coche), had been repaid with ingratitude. Mercy arranged that the appointment should appear to be the work of de Maurepas and the King, to shield Marie Antoinette from any charge of favouritism; for if he could not prevent some injudicious act, he could always ascribe it to some one else, and pretend it had been done in defiance of her wishes. But he told the facts to the Empress.

CHAPTER XVIII

Depression in France—Sailing of the French and Spanish Fleets—Condition of French Navy—Ignominious Return—Marie Antoinette directs the New Campaign against the West Indies — Eruption of Vesuvius — Paul Jones attacks Scotland, and captures the Baltic Convoy—French Finances—Economy at Court and its Results—The Comte de Vaudreuil—The Privy Purse of the Queen—Useful Graces to the de Polignac Family

THE war with England dragged heavily. Depression brooded upon France, for there was no glory to divert the minds of the taxpayers from the fact that they had picked a quarrel with their best customers. Nothing that could be accounted as righteousness to the Ministers of the Marine; and far too much righteousness in a Court that did not even supply material for domestic scandals. The reign of the previous monarch had at least compensated for dearth by the provision of an unfailing and spicy dish of scandal. Times were very dull; but hope sprang up again when the fleet (refitted at last after its encounter off Ushant in July 1778), sailed from Brest on July 9, 1779. The Comte d'Orvilliers was in command; there were sixty-six French vessels

of the line, besides sixteen Spanish—an imposing menace, visible to English eyes as the fleet neared our shores ; and then rested becalmed in the Channel. Eighty-two ships of war, within sight of English land, making for Plymouth or Portsmouth : and the news received that the first blow had been struck, the British 64-gun *Ardent* captured by the frigates *Junon* and *Gentille*. Portsmouth bank closed, all commerce ceased in the town, the guards at the dockyards were reinforced, all buoys removed from the sea-way, and all sea-marks destroyed. Admiral Hardy had only thirty-seven vessels with which to await the overwhelming superiority of the united Bourbon fleets. The militia watched day and night upon the south coasts ; and prepared, if Hardy failed, to resist the landing of the French and Spanish forces, whose arrogant array was held motionless, in clear view, by the accident of still, windless air.

But within that great fleet were seething the elements of its own defeat. The utter incompetence of the French naval officers, the frantic insubordination of the men, were matters of common knowledge to French writers of the day. They describe the departure of the fleet that was ordered to destroy the naval supremacy of England. "Several transports fell foul of each other, owing to the extreme ignorance of their captains. Some of the ships were leaking so much that they had to be exchanged for others; the *Conquérant* itself had a leak that obliged them to man the pumps three times a day. . . . Several times the

signal of departure was hoisted; this was the moment taken by everybody to go on land, especially the ship's officers and the captains; they could not be prevailed upon even to sleep on board."

The total lack of discipline among the sailors was horrifying even to the French soldiers who accompanied the expedition. "The insubordination of the naval officers exceeds everything one could imagine; their pride is unexampled, and quite groundless. In the whole navy there is nothing but jealousies and disobedience; any officer who has not commenced as midshipman is abhorred and despised . . . with such prejudice that the only way to reform the service would be to destroy it entirely and then reconstruct it." Of obedience they had not even an idea. "If a minister dared to send us an order that did not suit us, we should send it back and refuse to follow it," said one. "That may be in the best interests of the State, but not in ours; and it shall not be done," said another. Even the two fleets could not refrain from insulting each other. "Sweet-water sailors" was what the officers of the Brest squadron termed those from the Mediterranean; and the naval officers on board the *Provence* (on which was the Duc de Lauzun) maintained hotly that Constantinople was on the Tiber; and studied the map of the Black Sea, calling it the Mediterranean. Contagious diseases raged on board each ship, even before departure. The provisions were bad; water stale and tainted, and "red with age." There were no medical necessaries;

and no isolation was possible in a foul ship packed so full of human beings that they could not move as they lay. The sailors were fed like pigs, eating their hard biscuit, salt meat, or soup of beans or cabbage, from troughs as they sat upon the decks. The French accounts speak enviously of the better state of English ships. "They are kept in excellent sanitary condition [all things are comparative]; ours are the victims of fatal indifference; and are, besides, infected with disease." Yet our own sailors considered themselves ill-treated in a way that justified the mutinies of the Nore and of Spithead.

Hardy, with a fleet so greatly inferior in numbers, was obliged to remain on the defensive in Plymouth. The great and threatening enemy sailed away in search of him, and hovered idly about the mouth of the Channel. French caricatures represent d'Orvilliers as a Colossus with one foot on Ushant, and the other on the Scilly Islands, spying for a wind; while Hardy's little fleet sails between his feet. D'Orvilliers heard that Hardy was in Plymouth Harbour and sailed back to blockade the port. But there came a great thunder-storm, and the Bourbon admirals retired with all speed back again into Brest, "thankful to be there without yet greater evils befalling them." There was an outburst of fury from the fire-eating camps of Paramé and Vaucieux; after so great pomp and power and such display, to return to Brest leaving Hardy master of the Channel, with his little fleet intact, uninjured. No chance now of a descent upon

England; the disgusted officers returned to Court, and explained how they would have ensured victory if they had been in command. De Choiseul sent a little poisoned shaft: "De Maurepas is a sagacious minister—but his watch is six months slow." And the light, imperturbable old de Maurepas replied: "The Duc may be right—but *his* watch has stopped!"

Mercy wrote that the uproar at Court had been so great that Marie Antoinette had sent for de Maurepas and told him that she disapproved, in general, the actions of the Government. "The Comte de Vaux [one of those destined to command the army of invasion in England] is quite unsuitable; the Marquis de Castries is greatly to be preferred; instead of keeping the fleet cruising about the entrance to the Channel and trying to snap up the English merchantmen, it would be better to direct all efforts against their islands in the West Indies." In consequence of the Queen's sharp, incisive directions, that the war should be prosecuted with some idea of intelligence, instead of with such dilatory folly that sixteen months of hostilities had only to show the glory of two *non-defeats*, the fleet sailed for the West Indies. The Comte d'Estaing went in command; although he had at first refused, saying he was not equal to dealing with such insubordination and mutiny. "It needs greater audacity than I possess to take charge of a French squadron."

4 July, 1779.

Marie Thérèse was filled with the keenest interest. She wrote how sincerely she longed, for Louis' sake,



INSTRUCTIONS FOR TREATY OF COMMERCE WITH THE UNITED STATES, 1786,
Signed by Joseph II., Emperor of Austria.
(*From the original document at the Château d'Argenteau.*)

[*Page* 651.

that peace should soon be made. "A naval war is even more cruel than one on land, and more expensive." The Empress had the most delicate diplomatic position to maintain. Desirous, above all things, to strengthen the alliance with France, she found that her own subjects were still mindful of old alliances with England; and remembered subsidies generously given to place the Empress upon the throne. "The preference here for England grows greater day by day." She found also that her constant endeavours to maintain the understanding with France were frustrated by the actions of her son Joseph II., whose English leaning was taken for granted by the nation that knew his anti-French sentiments. He had openly advised Holland not to take up arms against England, as it was not to that country's commercial interests that the allied Bourbons should gain the upper hand. He wrote to Marie Antoinette his opinion (just, but injudicious) that the Comte d'Artois was more suited to organise a horse-race than command a man-of-war; and Marie Thérèse deprecated, although she was unable to prevent, this unseemly plainness of speech.

The Empress wrote to her daughter a letter full of varied interests. "I write to you from the middle of the Danube," she begins, and she ends in a postscript: "Pardon the blots and the bad writing; they are caused by the jerk of the oars." She said that she always carried with her the portrait of the little "Madame Fille du Roi," 1 September, 1779.

and it was on a chair facing her at the moment of writing. (That little Madame was cutting her teeth and could say "Papa" had been the only subjects upon which Marie Antoinette had written to her mother with pleased interest. Marie Thérèse had told Mercy that she liked the portrait, but it was "too much like the father"; and she was sure the complexion was flattered). She continued with a description of the appalling eruption of Vesuvius that marked 1779 with as disastrous a distinction for the first year of life of little Madame (the ill-fated Duchesse d'Angoulême), as the terrible earthquakes in 1755 had that of the infant Marie Antoinette.

The eruption of Vesuvius, like every other natural phenomenon, was taken by the populace as an ebullition of nature's sympathy with the Bourbons. The war, in which the kingdoms of the world were flaming, was typified for them by the explosion that reduced Ottojano to ashes. It only remained for the volcano to emit a *mémoire justificatif* to render the likeness complete; and the point is proved by the Empress's description of her daughter (the Queen of Naples) and her husband being held hostages by the mob for the good behaviour of the mountain. "The populace there [in Naples] is horrible and fanatical, and far more to be feared than any eruption. Thirty to forty thousand men went and forced the church open and obliged them [the priests] to carry St. Januarius in procession. The King and she [her daughter] had the greatest trouble to get safely out

of the theatre in which they were; and they kept as hostages the two nobles sent to them, to pacify them and suggest they should wait until the day of the procession. They did not do any harm, but they insisted all the same on their demands. It is awful to have subjects like those!"

She writes also her fear that even the great superiority in numbers of the allied fleets will not avail against the English, and that she is very uneasy to hear that "the whole shop [*toute la boutique*] is in the Channel." September brought some relief and better news to France; the Comte d'Estaing had captured Grenada, but the siege of Savannah was a failure. When the news reached London that the siege had been raised, guns were fired at the Tower and in St. James's Park; it was long since an opportunity of rejoicing had arisen. In this same month of September the Scottish buccaneer, Paul Jones, attacked Scotland. The endless procrastinations and futilities that marked every step of hostilities against England, disgusted Paul Jones with his French allies; and while they wrangled over points of precedence, he acted. He appeared off the east coast of Scotland with one armed brigantine and three small ships of war; and then, by good seamanship and reckless courage, made a brilliant appearance in that theatre of war whose spectators watched the scene from Flamborough Head. The Baltic fleet, under convoy of the two English frigates, *Serapis* and *Scarborough*, was intercepted; and the whole captured

by Paul Jones and his force, and the prizes carried off to the Dutch ports. Then, while his name was still on every tongue, he reappeared, this time in the Firth of Forth; and Edinburgh awaited disaster and humiliation, until the rising of a strong west wind blew his ships out of the Firth.

But expenses went on, although they brought no interest of glory for the investment. The Treasury was drained; it was of an emptiness inconceivable to those who remembered it in the reign of Louis XV. as always full enough to supply the just wants of all persons whose length of pedigree qualified them to dip in it. Poverty, real deprivations, began to be felt; the most desperate feats of finance could raise nothing to equal the yearly expenditure. Loans were proposed, but the nations of Europe had other outlets for their money. Fresh taxes were imposed, which brought in little but clamour. The deficit grew greater each year, and each year the revenue shrank. The Court found, to its stupefaction, that funds did not permit the usual visit to Compiègne; the visit, so invariable, so essential, that it had been marked on each year's calendar by Louis XV. upon every 1 January, and undertaken with inexorable decision, even if death threatened to interpose. But debt is greater than death, and the Court went into accounts, and looked ruefully at bills for 600,000 livres [£24,000], the cost of the last visit. It was reckoned that they might take two trips to Choisy for that amount and yet save 80,000 livres [£3,200]. But

even Choisy entailed more expenditure than was advisable.

Marie Antoinette's letter to her mother contained a new note: "We have given up our plan of going to Fontainebleau, on account of the expenses of the war . . . we have been for five days to Choisy. Our fleet has not met the English, and has done absolutely nothing; it has been a useless campaign and has cost much money. The most grievous thing is the sickness that is in the fleet and has ravaged it. Dysentery is raging in Brittany and Normandy; and has caused great loss and distress amongst the troops stationed there for embarkment. The desolation is widespread. Sickness has broken out also among the Spanish troops; and this has chilled their ardour still more; and they have few means of recruiting." 14 October, 1779.

Back again to Brest came the useless French fleet in October 1779; and d'Orvilliers had to face the outbreak of public disappointment. He had been sent out with a fleet enormously superior to that of the English; he had wasted one hundred and four days in futile cruisings; had done nothing, seen nothing, captured nothing; and he had to report the deaths of over five thousand of his men from disease without a shot having been fired. The French history says the fate of the expedition was "*très-funeste*"; that of d'Orvilliers was equally so. He resigned his commission, and, broken down by the universal opprobrium, disappeared into the seminary of St. Magloire

in Paris. His end is unknown. "The futility of this expedition prevents any idea of peace," says Marie Antoinette, "for next year the English will be sure to make greater efforts than ever, but they will be much hampered by America, and perhaps also by Ireland; and they must have suffered and lost much already this year. . . . M. de Cordua [Cordova, the Spanish Admiral] has left us and gone back, with fifteen vessels, to Spain. . . . Our ships are disarmed and laid up for the winter. . . . My daughter has four teeth now." With her interests thus equitably divided, the Queen maintained an even balance.

There had been so great an accession of public credit after the announcement that the Court had refrained from the journeys to Fontainebleau or Compiègne on grounds of economy, that every one felt justified in launching out a little. A saving of nearly 80,000 livres inspired such feeling of solvency that the Queen at once prepared to spend it ten-fold. She granted a pension (at the prayer of the Comtesse de Polignac) to the Comte de Vaudreuil; who was in considerable pecuniary embarrassments, as all his income was derived from the West Indies, and the British corsairs rendered that source very precarious. De Vaudreuil was considered by Mercy to have far too good reasons for this great interest taken in him by the Comtesse de Polignac. "Their friendship is a great deal too intimate," he suggests; and the reputation of de Vaudreuil gave grounds for any such belief, as it was founded entirely upon similar alliances.

He shared with Le Kain, the actor, the reputation of invincible attraction. "There are only two men who know how to talk to ladies: Le Kain and M. de Vaudreuil," said the Princesse d'Hénin, who spoke from much experience. The Comtesse de Polignac obtained a pension of 30,000 livres [£1,200] a year for her friend, payable from the Royal Treasury for such time as the war should last. Mercy's protests were quite vain; as were his suggestions that the economy that saved on a journey to Fontainebleau and squandered ten times the savings on faro was of no permanent benefit to the Treasury.

Gambling had begun again at Court with an energy the greater because it had been repressed for some months. "On the grounds of economy there had been no theatrical entertainments; the weather had been bad and rainy, and this prevented hunting or walking . . . so that, all other resources failing, they took again to gambling. It was not the Queen who first recommenced this dangerous amusement. . . . The Princesse de Lamballe permitted such furious gambling at her tables that in one evening the Duc de Chartres lost 8,000 louis [£7,680]. The Queen disapproved of this behaviour of her superintendent; and even expressed her disapprobation. But this did not prevent the re-establishment of faro at Marly. The King, without being encouraged to do it and of his own initiative, began to play, and lost 1,800 louis [£1,728]. The Queen lost about 1,200 louis, but won it nearly all back again. The

17 November, 1779.

Comte d'Artois and the Duc de Chartres were the greatest gamblers; the latter ended by losing 11,000 louis [£10,560]; and the Sieur de Chalabre, an officer of the Guards, who held the bank, won 19,000 louis [£18,240] while the Court was at Marly."

Mercy describes the chaos in the accounts that resulted from the economical journey to Marly. "The King suspected that the finances of the Queen might be a little disorganised, so he pressed her to tell him how they stood; and with all the graciousness and good nature possible, he took everything in the way of banknotes or gold that he could find in his own privy purse and brought it to the Queen. This sum amounted to 100,000 francs [£4,000]; and after all the little debts were paid, there remained about 30,000 livres [£1,200] in hand. This was infringed upon by the play at Marly; but the Queen won sufficient back to reduce the loss to an inconsiderable amount. The King was not so lucky; and, having lost, found himself much embarrassed to pay, as he had given everything to the Queen, and would not draw upon the Royal Treasury. He receives 5,000 louis [£4,800] on the first of each month for his privy purse; but this month's revenue was all spent. The Queen, who knew his embarrassment, came to his help, and lent him about 1,200 louis; and the King procured 500 louis elsewhere. It is a good thing that the King has been so unlucky in his first attempts at gambling; it will prevent him taking to it, . . . The privy purse of the Queen, which has been

200,000 livres [£8,000] a year, is to be doubled . . . but with great delicacy of feeling the Queen has announced that as long as the war lasts she will content herself with a total sum of 100,000 écus, [£12,000] a year." Mercy adds that this amount is intended "purely for acts of voluntary generosity," as everything relating to the service of the Queen or her dress, "even to her pins for the toilet," is paid from other sources.

But all "acts of generosity" were charged to the Royal Treasury, without any restricting ideas of its possible exhaustion, as if no fund were devoted to this special purpose. Mercy records those that had for object the family of the Comtesse de Polignac; and had certainly not been paid out of the Queen's privy purse. "I notice that the said Comtesse seems now extraordinarily keen to make the fortunes of her whole family; and she will be content with nothing less than obtaining, as a free gift from the King, an estate worth 100,000 livres [£4,000] a year. . . . She employed the Comte d'Artois to suggest this to the Queen, which he did with most pressing importunity. . . . Even the Queen was rather frightened at this unreasonable demand; but finally adopted the idea, and only thought of ways of carrying it out. But the ways are not easy to find, especially as in the last four years the members of the family of de Polignac, without any services to the State, and wholly as favours, have received nearly 500,000 livres [£20,000] a year in appointments and similar benefits."

17 December, 1779.

The Comtesse de Polignac had been ill since the notable attack of measles, and she felt that her health could not be re-established except by a gift of Crown lands. The estate of Bitche in Lorraine had the further remedial advantage that it was a famous Imperial appanage. It had been part of the great duchy of Lorraine, over which Marie Thérèse and her husband had ruled before it was ceded to France in 1738 (by the treaty of Vienna), in purchase of France's recognition of Marie Thérèse as the heiress of Austria. France accepted Lorraine, signed the treaty; and violated it two years afterwards by sending troops to oppose the accession of Marie Thérèse and to assist her enemy Charles Albert, Elector of Bavaria, to obtain the Austrian throne. By the help of her kingdom of Hungary and of the alliance of England, Marie Thérèse was confirmed in her right as Empress of Austria; but Lorraine was lost to her, and she retained throughout her life the love of Lorraine and of her friends there.

To Mercy the idea of a de Polignac becoming owner of a part of the Lorraine duchy was almost sacrilege, for his own house had been for centuries connected with the Dukes of Lorraine and Bar. Among the old charters of the family there is the treaty, signed in 1290, between Roger de Mercy and Thibaut, Comte de Bar, allying themselves to make war against the Comte de Luxembourg. Pierre Ernest de Mercy followed Charles IV., Duc de Lorraine, in the wars with Germany; he followed

Charles V. of Lorraine in the wars that Louis XIV. brought upon all Europe, and when de Mercy returned to his home after the Treaty of Ryswick he found that Louis XIV. had demolished his Château de Mercy in Lorraine, and also confiscated his estates. Duke Leopold of Lorraine (who had married a niece of the French King) retained his duchy when the Ryswick treaty left France, in 1697, as she had been before the war; and he recompensed de Mercy for his own and his ancestors' services by giving him other estates in Lorraine. The son of Pierre Ernest was Florimond de Mercy, marshal of the armies of Charles VI., in whose service he was killed near Parma in 1754, the year before the birth of Marie Antoinette. He left by will his Lorraine estates back to the Dukes of Lorraine whom he had served so faithfully; and his other possessions to the de Mercy-Argenteau House, whose representative was his namesake Florimond Claude, the guardian of Marie Antoinette, a man of thirty-two years of age at the time of the great marshal's death.

It was not only Mercy who was shocked at the idea of these Lorraine lands passing to the de Polignacs. There was still at Court the Comtesse de Brionne, of the Imperial house of Lorraine (ambitious mother of the Prince de Lambesc, the Prince de Vaudemont, the Prince d'Elbeuf, and of the Princesse Charlotte of Lorraine), who thought that no estates could be well bestowed on any but her own family. Madame de Brionne was playing a great game, with

the ambition of ousting Madame de Polignac from her position of favourite, and installing her daughter Charlotte in her place. The Princesse Charlotte was, as Marie Thérèse admits, "very pretty and very charming—one is not so certain about her character." She was possessed of one of those conventual appointments in which a woman of quality could be as much or as little of a nun as she desired. She was Abbess of Remiremont; of which convent the Duchesse de Gramont was Canoness, and drew a stipend for her services to religion. Mademoiselle de Lorraine also drew a stipend, and this was her chief religious duty. One of her privileges as Abbess was to receive tribute from the neighbouring villages, and this was generally more profitable than the annual offering from the village of Fougerolles, which had to present (under penalty of two oxen) a dish of snow each Pentecost. This immemorial tribute first failed in 1783, when the ingenious peasants replaced it by a dish of "*œufs à la neige.*"

The intrigues of Madame de Brionne failed in so far that she was unable to shake the friendship of the Queen for the Comtesse de Polignac; but the question of the Lorraine estate was dropped in face of such opposition. The Comtesse de Polignac was given 400,000 livres [£16,000] to pay her debts, a *dot* for her daughter (Comtesse de Gramont) of 800,000 livres [£32,000], and the promise of some other estate of the yearly rental of 35,000 livres [£1,400].

CHAPTER XIX

The Finances of France—Necker—The System of Taxation—The Rights of the King and the Rights of Seigneurs—Retrenchment and Royal Indignation—National Bankruptcy while the King plays Blindman's Buff—Theatricals in the Trianon—Madame Necker—Death of the Empress Marie Thérèse—Reforms of Joseph II. and his Death. Mercy-Argenteau Governor of the Netherlands.

PRUDENCE, in the ponderous person of M. Necker, persuaded Marie Antoinette to withdraw the claim for a great estate for the Comtesse de Polignac. The Director-General of Finance, with unanswerable arguments, showed that so absurd a demand would be published from the house-tops of Paris; but a mere trifle of ready money, such as £50,000 down, *might* be hidden, as Royal accounts were fortunately not subject to examination. And the de Polignacs consented, unwillingly, to accept the paltry trifle of 800,000 livres as a dowry for their daughter, the usual sum in such cases being but 6,000 livres. Not even the desire of Necker to please the Queen in all things, could produce this sum without expostulation and great difficulty. The plainest exposition of facts could not open the eyes of the

Court to the abyss of bankruptcy into which it was slipping.

There were twenty millions of subjects who existed solely for the use of the King, besides the four or five millions whose nobility precluded them from being of use to the King or to any one else. In this year of 1780 Necker computed that there were four thousand *offices*, whose holding ensured nobility, *i.e.*, freedom from taxation. The number of hereditary nobles was immense; and as all descendants of a noble retained the privileges of his rank, they naturally increased with each generation. There were grades within the nobility, and the higher despised the lower; but all shared the distinction of being free from the burden of taxation. There was the *noblesse d'épée*, men of the sword; *noblesse de robe*, men of the long robe, as judges; *noblesse de finance*, the flower of whose nobility sprang from the root of all evil; and *noblesse d'administration*, the cream of bureaucracy. The *noblesse d'épée*, whose rank had been won by the sword that remained one of its insignia, was the only one of the grades really acceptable to the Court.

In Mercy's letter he mentions an affront given to the *noblesse de finance*: "The Queen, 'Madame,' and the Comtesse d'Artois agreed that they would no longer receive among their ladies such as were of financial extraction. The Vicomtesse de Laval applied for the position of lady-in-waiting to 'Madame,' but it was refused, despite a promise of some years standing." Madame de Laval was the

17 January, 1780.

niece of the Archbishop of Metz; she was very brilliant, very elegant, very beautifully dressed, and very extravagant; until, by a usual transition, she became deeply religious. Her husband was a great —and very lucky—gambler. "All the family of de Montmorency was so indignant that the Duc de Laval and his son the Vicomte at once resigned their posts as First Gentlemen of the Chamber to 'Monsieur.'"

But though jealousies and heart-burnings might be caused by the difference in grades, one great distinction remained in common—they paid no taxes. With the philosophy that relegated the deluge comfortably to the next reign, came the traffic in posts or lands that secured exemption from future taxation by present payments. By payment a title of nobility could be purchased; by payment lands could be bought, which gave not only freedom from taxation for ever, but seigneurial rights that indemnified the preliminary outlay, by permission to squeeze the peasants living upon the estate. The Church, "*l'Infâme*" of Voltaire, paid nothing at all, although it owned one-third of the lands of France. The Parlements paid nothing; all officials in the service of Government—and they were legion—paid nothing. The purchase of an appointment, a title, or an estate was therefore an investment of capital. The needs of the French monarchy had encouraged this traffic; its inevitable result came in the dwindling of revenues caused by the increasing number of un-

taxable persons, who now reaped the reward of their own or their fathers' shrewd investment in nobility. The burden of the State's support thus pressed solely on the lower classes, who were ground into the dust, to raise the means of carrying on the appearance of Royalty from one year to the next.

Taxes were levied with such calculating ingenuity, that there was nothing in the possession of the most wretched herd that was exempt, except that "chilly, tight-fitting coat of nothing in front and nothing behind and sleeves of the same," as Rabelais called his skin. That the peasants recognised this as their one exemption was shown in the Revolution by their fiendish revenge of the tannery of Meudon; where the skins of their hated seigneurs were made into "perfectly good washleather for breeches . . . equal to shamoy." It was chronicled calmly that the exquisite women of the French nobility were as useless in death as in life, for their skins were "good for nothing, being too soft in texture."

Of the taxes from which were wrung the revenues of the French monarchy, the chief were the *Taille*, *Capitation*, the *Vingtième*, the *Corvée*, and the *Gabelle*. The *Taille* was a tax on land or on income from land; this touched every little farmer. *Capitation* was a poll-tax, from which no living soul was supposed to be exempt. The *Vingtième* was a tax of the twentieth part of a franc, levied arbitrarily and at the pleasure of the Government whenever money was needed, and even doubled or trebled when occasion

served. The *Corvée* was forced labour, to which every peasant was subject. He was obliged to leave his farm or employment, no matter what the urgency of his own harvest, take his ox and carry wood, make roads, transport convicts to the awful "*Bagne*," or perform any other duty required. He might be called off for fifty days in the year, while his corn rotted or his hay spoiled. No age was exempt; the child had his *Corvée*, the old man had his.

Gabelle, the name of which (from *gabe*, a gift) was so neatly ironical, was the tax on salt, which produced thirty-eight millions of francs [£1,520,000], in the reign of Louis XVI. Every person in France above seven years of age had to consume, or at least purchase, seven pounds of salt a year; a strict watch was kept on the increase of every family and the head of it had to pay the Government price (for it was a State monopoly) for himself, his wife, and each child over seven years. The tax was the more resented because it was not uniform; in one province it was a halfpenny the pound, in another sixpence. Salt smuggling was in consequence so profitable that the risks of death or the galleys were run to evade the officials. At least ten thousand men were imprisoned each year for evading the salt tax, about five hundred hanged, and another five hundred sent to the *Bagne*. For the law seized all who did not eat his seven pounds of salt; all who paid for that amount but used it for other purposes, such as to give to their cattle; all who manufactured salt for themselves; all who smuggled

it from one province into another ; all who used it for salting food for trade unless paid for in addition to the minimum seven pounds. But there was no *Gabelle* for nobles, clerics, or Government officials.

When the peasant had satisfied his King's demands, there were the rights of his seigneur to be fulfilled ; and these were even more oppressive. Upon one fief the following were the seigneur's rights, and this was by no means an uncommon instance. All offices of Government, all the civil jurisdiction, gaoler, bailiffs, etc., were in the seigneur's gift, and had to be paid for. All Jewish families had a special tax to permit them to exist. The tenth of *everything*, small and great, was his—chickens, corn, hay, potatoes, etc. Every wife on the estate had to spin two pounds of flax a year. Every male and every female to work ten days a year for nothing. Every cart and waggon to work ten days a year. Every innkeeper to pay for his sign. Every gallon of wine to pay duty. Rights of heriot existed ; taxes on salt, tar, coal, etc. All these were sanctioned by general use up to the time of the Revolution. Carlyle says that the law authorising a seigneur, as he returned from hunting, to kill not more than two serfs and refresh his feet in their warm blood, had by now fallen into desuetude. But the law "*Mercheta Mulierum*," the right of the seigneur paramount over that of any peasant husband on the wedding night, was long enforced.

The legacy of his fathers to Louis XVI. was one of colossal corruption. In every department of State,

in every detail of administration, such gross deep-rooted evils flourished, that the reform, even of surface trifles, caused an outbreak of fury from those whose privilege of peculation was thereby infringed. Common honesty and fair-mindedness did not exist in departments of State, where the measure of roguery was its opportunity. They did not exist in the classes to whom the word justice meant merely the recognition of their own privileges. All men had their price; bribery was as natural as breathing; and the best-natured man of quality denied the bond of a common humanity with his serfs. To Louis were given two great chances, and he threw both away. Turgot or Necker would have saved his kingdom for him; but his feeble brain probably first realised on the scaffold that there had been any necessity for such salvation.

Louis was so good-natured that he refused to abolish serfdom; he was so great a lover of justice that he refused to interfere with the rights of—the seigneurs. He loved the idea of equality of man so much that he plunged France into war to support the abstract quality in America; but he submitted Necker himself to humiliations because he was a mere Protestant and of bourgeois family. By one edict Louis could have freed all the serfs in France; but his idea of justice prevented his passing so just an act. He freed his own serfs, and left all those unfreed who had the misfortune to be on Church lands or slaves to his seigneurs. Turgot abolished the *Corvée*;

Louis reimposed it through de Clugny, doubtless because he so loved his people that he would not remove from them their right to labour. Necker cut down expenses by removing in this year of 1780 no less than four hundred and six posts at Court, useless hangers-on to the King's household; and his fall became inevitable, for who was there at Court, from the de Polignacs downward, who did not recognise that he also was a mere hanger-on and also useless?

Paris, 17 April, 1780.

Chief amongst those who raised indignant outcries against the suppression of fat sinecures were the brothers of the King and the Duc d'Orléans. Mercy relates that these three Princes regarded all similar economies as infringements upon their sacred rights of patronage, which they sold for high prices. The Comte d'Artois was, as usual, louder than any one in his disgust at any retrenchment; but Marie Antoinette was not dragged into any support of his complaints. It was true that the Queen had no cause of complaint herself; the title of Duc had been bestowed upon the husband of the Comtesse de Polignac, who by this means became a Duchesse, and as such entitled to the privilege of her rank, that of sitting on the "*tabouret*," or foot-stool, in her Majesty's presence. The ducal title was no empty grace, for a suitable estate was provided—out of the Royal Treasury to Necker's wrath.

Poor Necker had a hard time in this year. He could please no one. The King could recognise no

virtue in a financier who came from Geneva and refused to give up his Calvinism ; the Court objected to a bourgeois who dared to limit the privileges of their rank ; the wealthy middle classes violently opposed a man who intended to make them bear a fair share of the taxes. The ministers delighted in obliging Necker to sit alone in outer Protestantism in a little room under the roof of Versailles while they discussed his projects of finance ; for the good of the State required a financier to be of the religion of the Abbé Terray before he could be present at a Council. The war with England demanded such incessant supplies that a country already bankrupt could not raise them ; but no thought of peace was entertained until absolute exhaustion compelled it. The sums raised for a war, that was popular because it was against England, never reached the navy for which they were voted ; they melted by the way. In 1780 one hundred and forty-three millions of francs [£5,720,000] were spent on the navy ; and at the end of it the men had not even received their arrears of pay. Not even the gallant fighting of the French sailors could avail them, with the ignorance of their commanders nullifying their efforts ; and almost the only news that came to France was of losses and disasters. Taxes could raise no more, and the fatal policy of loans was impairing public credit. The King saved on a country trip, and then rushed into extravagances that made Mercy groan in sympathy with Necker.

The Court, however, saw no reason to groan. Mercy tells of diversions that appear to him wholly unsuitable for the King and Queen of France. "Amusements have been introduced of such noisy and puerile character that they are little suited to Lenten meditations, and still less to the dignity of the august personages who take part in them. They are games resembling blindman's buff, that first lead to the giving of forfeits, and then to their redemption by some bizarre penance; the commotion is kept up sometimes until late into the night. The number of persons who take part in these games, both of the Court and the town, makes them still more unsuitable; every one is surprised to see that the King plays them with great zest, and that he can give himself up wholly to such frivolities in such a serious condition of State affairs as obtains at present."

The spectacle of Louis XVI. playing forfeits while his kingdom slipped from him, filled Mercy with horror, the keener because he recognised that all blame would fall upon Marie Antoinette. "The Queen, who has not the slightest taste for this sort of amusement, lends herself to these games purely from good nature; but the unjust public lays upon her the odium of it all. . . ." So absorbed was the King (now twenty-six years old) in the games of blindman's buff and forfeits (games suited to his mental capacity), that his pleasure in them was a sad revelation to those who had hoped for a permanent brightening of wits. "The Comte de Maurepas is suspected of having introduced this incongruous amuse-

ment in order to lead the King into total abandonment of affairs." This sentence shows Mercy's despair of the future of France, whose ruler was too engrossed in a new nursery game to play any longer at being King. "It will be as pernicious to the credit of the young monarch as it is injurious to the personal interests of the Queen." The public could more easily pardon the mania for faro, with its losses of thousands of louis, than the blameless love of blindman's buff that alone woke their King into eager interest in his surroundings. Marie Antoinette, faithful to her duty, watched over her husband with care; and never left him, lest some chances might arise of diverting his unstable mind from her in her absence.

Mercy said: "I see that the Queen becomes ever more attentive to her husband and partici- 16 August, 1780.
pates daily in his amusements. The King is very fond of a game called loto. It consists in drawing out a number of balls, with figures on them which correspond to those on a card; this results in an extremely minute gain to those players who draw the right figure. The Queen has no taste for this game —it even bores her—but she diligently arranges for it after supper, and her Majesty plays at it until the King wishes to go to bed—that is to say, until about eleven o'clock."

Marie Antoinette's preference was for less simple and childish pleasures. She had discovered in herself a talent for the stage; and the pleasure of acting in her own little theatre of Trianon was greater than

that derived from the gorgeous fête given by the Princesse de Guéménée in her vast and beautiful garden at Versailles. The occasion was the marriage of her daughter, the Princesse de Montbazon to the Prince de Rohan Rochefort. The fête was so magnificent that even Mercy speaks of it with respect; and one of its results was the bankruptcy of the Guéménée family and the desolation the ruin of that house brought upon France. "There was a sort of Arcadia, with illuminations, fireworks, entertainments, and a ball. The King, the Queen, and all the Royal Princes and Princesses were present at this fête, and remained there throughout the whole night."

But ostentation, even if it involved the ruin of thousands, had no charm for the Queen, and her chief pleasure at this time was private theatricals, so very private that the only spectators were the King and the Princes and Princesses; and Mercy himself (by special command), who hid himself in a box, lest the distinction of being the sole guest should lead to jealousies from the uninvited. Not even the ladies-in-waiting or the chief officers might be present, but in the distance the silent, respectful little throng of valets and *femmes de chambre*.

Mercy took the new amusement with philosophy. "The time necessary to learn their parts, and the rehearsals, will keep them all out of mischief in gambling; and when they are performing in the evening they cannot be walking out on the terrace." The actresses were the Queen, the Duchesse de

Polignac and her cousin, the Comtesse de Châlons (the lady supposed by false rumour to have placed unrecognised temptation in the way of the King); the actors were the Comte de Polignac, the Comte d'Adhémar (French Ambassador to Brussels), and the Comte Esterhazy. Two well-known actors, Caillot and Dazincourt, were chosen as instructors; and their lessons resulted in the usual performances such as are expected from noble amateurs. The King yawned openly; he woke up once and hissed the Queen, who was playing the Marquise de Clainville in *La Gageure imprévue.* Marie Antoinette thereupon made a little speech: "I have done what I could to amuse you; I would like to have played better to have better pleased you. Another time I will try harder." But Louis did not care. Madame Campan says of the dramatic company that "it was good—for a society company;" but every one said privately of the performance that it had been "Royally badly played."

Mercy's account was, however, that of an eye-witness, and it differs a little from that of contemporary writers, who, for obvious reasons, must have written from hearsay. **Paris, 14 October, 1780.** He watched from within a box, screened from all observation by those in the theatre; and he was conducted to this place in the theatre by a man who guided him so that he did not encounter any one. Thus there was no outcry and no intrigue resulting from this favour. The company played two little

comic operas : *Rose et Colas* and *Le Devin du Village* ; the performers were the Comte d'Artois, the Duc de Guiche, the Comte d'Adhémar, the Duchesse de Polignac, and the Duchesse de Guiche in the first piece. " The Queen played the part of Colette in the second piece, the Comte de Vaudreuil sang that of the soothsayer and the Comte d'Adhémar that of Colin. The Queen has a very pretty and very true voice, her manner of acting is dignified and full of grace ; in short, this performance was quite as well done as any society entertainment could be. I noticed that the King was attentive, and that his expression seemed pleased ; between the scenes he went up on to the stage to see the Queen in her dressing-room. The only spectators beside the King were 'Monsieur,' the Comtesse d'Artois, and Madame Elizabeth. In the balcony circle were a few of the servants, but there was no person of the Court present."

That such theatricals were better than gambling, and certainly more economical, was the consolation of Marie Thérèse, who took the most statesmanlike interest in the finance of Necker. She studied his methods of improving the revenues ; and sent many messages of appreciation to him and to Madame Necker. One message, that was sent to Mercy, with instructions to convey it to Madame Necker, was so flattering to the vanity of the once neglected betrothed of the gay Gibbon, that she asked Mercy if she might copy it out and keep as a souvenir. The Empress wrote : " You can tell Madame de Necker,

that when the painter Liotard came here from Geneva a few years ago I wished to examine his pictures. I was struck with one among them representing a pretty young person, with a book in her hand, in a very interesting attitude. I liked the picture so much that I became possessed of it. It is the portrait of Madame Necker which I always look at with pleasure." This flattering presentment is very different from the description given by the Marquise de Créquy of Madame Necker : " She was a big woman, got up, stayed, stiffened, always in her best clothes (*endimanchée*), always as if just out of a band-box ; and tied up as if she were a packet of tobacco. She had the figure of a savings bank and the physiognomy of a register by double entry. She was merely the town of Geneva in an orange satin case. Doubtless a very worthy person, but an insupportable pedant."

The Marquise de Créquy marked the distinction between persons of words and of deeds. Madame Necker's " insupportable pedantry " included the authorship of *Reflections on Divorce.* Other ladies did not publish their reflections.

Madame Necker's refinements of speech gave rise to much derision from those at Court who had no scruples at all in speech. She would never speak, for instance, of the *thigh* of a partridge, or of the *rump* of a turkey, always referring to the *mître* instead of *croupion* when designating that portion of the bird ; and using the term *portefeuille* when speaking of the inside of an artichoke. This over-delicacy in a

coarse-tongued society invited strictures; and it was said openly that if Madame Necker were really of such reticent modesty, she would refrain from making such *exhibitions pectorales*, as these were not customary revelations. But the Court, in the person of the Marquise de Créquy, could have little in sympathy with the benevolent, learned reformer, Madame Necker, who was much more interested in hospitals and in prisons than in Royal fêtes at Versailles, and the brilliant spendthrifts whose existence left them no virtue but that of courage; but who gained in death the respect they had lost by life.

In the last month of 1780 came the blow that plunged Austria into desolation—the death of the great Empress Marie Thérèse. The news reached Marie Antoinette early in December; but her mother passed away on 29 November, Sovereign to the last, signing the State documents and receiving her Council. In the days of her death she was as great as in her life; calm and confident she died with dignity. "I have always tried to do my best; I trust in the mercy of God." She dictated letters to those of her children who were far away. Her son Joseph wrote them at her side. She waited, peacefully expectant: "I will not sleep; I do not wish to be taken unawares; I wish to watch death coming."

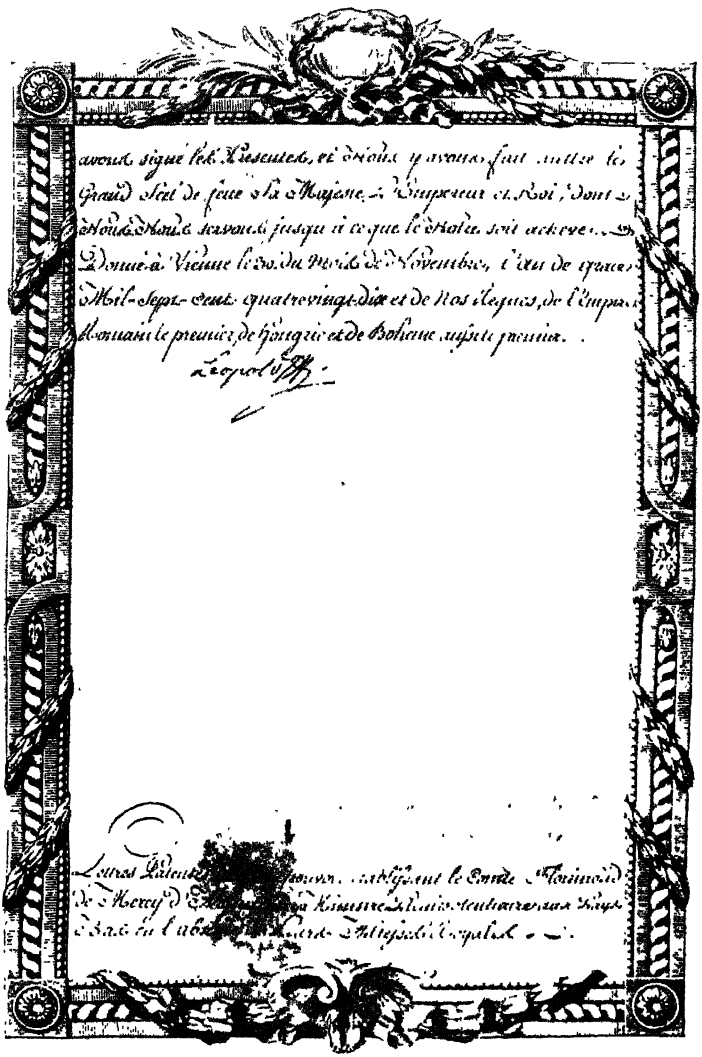
With the courage that had borne unshaken the burden of calamities she waited for the moment of her release; and in the intervals of weakness she planned for the future of her children. For her invalid eldest

daughter Marie Anne, deformed and ailing, she was full of thought; and with a voice almost quenched and scarcely audible she bade her think well before she took the convent vows; and above all she must promise not to leave her home for convent rigours till the winter months had passed. Her son Joseph was beside her, crushed with distress. The Empress called the doctor, and bade him take upon himself the duty of lighting her funeral taper—"It is asking too much of the Emperor." Marie Christine was there with her husband, Albert of Teschen, Elizabeth the Abbess of Innsbruck, and Maximilian her youngest child and favourite son. But her thoughts dwelt most upon those far away, and on Marie Antoinette, "my charming Queen," of whose future she thought with dread, although the prevision of her awful fate was spared her. Her last letters to Marie Antoinette and to Mercy were written on 3 November, 1780, but there is no knowledge that her eyes ever saw their answers. These letters of 3 November are sad and weary. "I am losing all I love, one after another," she wrote. To her friend Mercy she had written before: "Take care of yourself. You must remember we all grow older every day, and you have the happiness of both mother and daughter to safeguard."

That had been Mercy's work for ten years; for yet another ten years he strove to carry out his work. But the wise hand of the great Empress no longer guided the Austrian policy; and with her

passing, passed also the weight of the Franco-Austrian alliance. Upon his mother's death, Joseph had tried to whirl reform throughout his Empire His scheme for unification of his peoples led to their disruption. He tried to weld into one nation his heterogeneous nationalities—Austria, Hungary, Bavaria, the Netherlands—to compass the union of opposite faiths and customs and different races by sudden edicts. He ignored the invincible power of the Churches, of the priesthoods, in whom was vested all instruction; whose influence was boundless. He divided all the Netherlands into nine circles of influence, each with its governor, responsible to a Governor-General in Brussels. Then he proclaimed universal religious toleration, an affront to each intolerant religion. He interfered with the crusted methods of priestly instruction, and instituted a thorough school reform. One outbreak after another showed the folly of attempting to force unripe reforms; first, religious riots, then civil—till church and nobles, equally menaced in their privileges, led the mobs in open revolt.

Brabant refused to pay taxes till the old order was restored; the towns raised an armed volunteer force in order to compel the return of old and cherished abuses. Joseph refused to yield to the storm; sent troops to beat down the insurrection; and these were swept away by the angry swarms of rioters. The Netherlands declared themselves independent; civil war raged; monks, with crucifix in one hand and sword in the other, led the rioting armies to burn and



LETTERS PATENT, FROM LEOPOLD II., EMPEROR OF AUSTRIA.

Conferring the Governorship of the Netherlands on the Comte de Mercy-Argenteau.

(From the original documents at the Château d'Argenteau.)

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his prophecies. "The most unceasing efforts, the most unwearying perseverance cannot make them see with my eyes. . . . The danger presses equally upon all thrones, all will be overthrown if they do not unite to crush the monster rising against them." But the Powers could not unite; Mercy's warnings fell unheeded, although the result of his life's devotion: and his guardianship ended with the execution of Marie Antoinette.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX I

THE COINAGE IN USE IN 1770–1780

A POINT of great interest is the moneys in use in the period between 1770 and 1780. It has been a matter of considerable difficulty to trace the values of coins used in France at that period. The difficulty has been greatly enhanced by the lack of accord between the authorities; and by the looseness of eighteenth century account-keeping. The coins mentioned in the letters of the time are: *francs*, *livres*, *louis*, *pistoles*, *ducats*, and *écus*. Additional financial cobwebs are spun by the facts that there were *livres tournois*, *livres parisis*, and *livres sterlings*—all of different values, but all terms of current mention; that *petits écus* differed from *écus*; that the value of the louis apparently appreciated while that of other coins depreciated; and that pistoles and ducats did not exist as French coins at all, although current in nearly every other country of Europe than France.

To understand the coinage of 1770 it is necessary to go back exactly a thousand years earlier, for

Charlemagne established a coinage that obtained throughout the west of Europe for centuries after his reign. The libra, solidus, and denarius (from which terms come our £ *s.* *d.*), represented coins of certain relative value. The pound or livre was equal to twenty shillings or sous; the shilling or sou equalled twelve pence or deniers. But the value of the livre or pound depended on the extent of depreciation of the currency. In England this practice did not result in any change of relative value; in France it was carried to such disgraceful lengths that the French livre sank in value to the equivalent of $\frac{1}{20}$ to $\frac{1}{25}$ of our pound; the sou (five centimes) depreciated in the same ratio till it now stands at less than a halfpenny in value; and the denier (if such a coin still existed) would be worth $\frac{5}{12}$ of a centime. With an unstable currency and a falling rate, there must always be conflicting values of one denomination; and as the livre coined in Tours was more depreciated than that coined in Paris, a livre tournois was worth 20 sous or sols (each sou or sol was worth 12 deniers) and a livre parisis was worth 25 sous. An end was put to this rivalry in livres by an edict of Louis XIV., who, in 1667, ordered that only one livre should obtain—the livre tournois of 20 sous, equal in value to the franc of the present day. Livres sterlings are always to be taken as English livres or pounds sterling. The term "*au denier douze*" means "at a denier for every twelve"; in other words $8\frac{1}{3}$ per cent.

The next point is the louis. This varied in value in the long reign of Louis XV. He ascended the throne in 1715, and in 1716 the louis (commonly known as a *noailles*, from the Duc de Noailles, Director-General of Finance) was worth 35 francs 45 centimes. In 1726 an edict was passed, by which the louis d'or was made worth 480 sols, or 24 livres ; and these values remained unaltered in the re-coinage in 1785 ; but by a decree of 1810 the livres were transformed into the modern franc, to which they were very nearly, but not quite, equal in value. By that decree pieces of 48 livres (double louis) were declared = 47 francs 20 centimes ; and pieces of 24 livres (louis d'or) = 23 francs 55 centimes ; the difference may probably be accounted for by deterioration.

The question of the pistoles and ducats is more difficult to solve, as, there were no French coins of those denominations. The probabilities have to be weighed whether the pistole in use in France was the Bernese (value 18*s.* 7*d.*) ; or the Brunswick (approximately the same) ; or Genevese (worth 16*s.* 4*d.* old coinage, or 14*s.* 1*d.* new) ; or Spanish (only about 8*s.*) ; or whether several nationalities of pistole were in common use at the same time, as sovereigns and napoleons are current in Egypt at the present day. The weight of probability seems towards Spain, as that Bourbon kingdom would find little difficulty in exchanging its coins with France. An extremely interesting piece of confirmatory evidence comes from M. de Manneville, whose knowledge of the country

life of France makes him an authority on the rigid adherence to ancient custom, traditional amongst the French peasantry, the most conservative of people. It is curious to find that to this day the French peasant understands and can reckon with the pistole, although this never was a French coin, but is the name of a "*monnaie de compte*"; even as our non-existent guineas (the last were coined in 1817) remain to this day and the only coins of which a self-respecting professional man has any cognisance. This permanence of tradition preserves for us, therefore, the value of the pistole in eighteenth-century France; for in matters of coins the French peasants are so unchanging that they may be assumed to have kept the identical value; and when they reckon a pistole as 10 francs or livres, we may feel assured that a hundred years ago, this was its accepted value. Further evidence is given by J. J. Rousseau, who mentions 100 pistoles as equal to 1,000 livres; and we can therefore assume that the pistole of Court use in 1770 was of the value of 10 livres, the same as the Spanish coin. The écus were known as *le grand écu*, value 6 francs, and *le petit écu*, worth 3 francs; but écu used alone is always taken as the 3 franc écu. Ducats again were not French coins, nor was the term one of general use. As it occurs in Marie Antoinette's accounts we may conclude that she spoke of the coin of her own country; but whether she referred to the Austrian ducat of 13*s.* 10*d.* or the Hungarian or Kaunitz ducat of 9*s.* 5*d.*, or the double ducat of 18*s.* 9*d.*, must remain unresolved.

APPENDIX II

THE STEWARTS AND THE BOURBONS

ONE of Horace Walpole's letters from Paris in 1775 has reference to the Stewart descent of Louis XVI. That acute observer had gone to Paris with an open mind, and had received two intense surprises. There can be no higher proof of the exquisite attraction and charm of Marie Antoinette than the tribute of amazed admiration from the experienced courtier of nearly sixty (it is quoted on page 491). But what struck his trained eye in the Bourbon King was not his Bourbon but his Stewart type of face. He wrote to Lady Ossory: "If you saw how like this King is to one of King Charles's breed!" Louis was then just twenty-one; his heavy face had not yet become disfigured by the vast double chin that obliterated the natural proportions of his features. Walpole's startled recognition of the Stewart type that had reappeared in Louis XVI. gives rise to many interesting speculations. It is well known that there is a strong strain of heredity in the Stewart blood, by which family likenesses keep cropping up even to the present day, and are notably marked, even when the branches from which the individuals spring came from the

parent stem centuries ago. If this Stewart likeness is transmitted powerfully in the sound and sane, such strong hereditary impress would be shown even more powerfully in a man mentally and physically deficient. Louis XVI. was the thirty-second monarch of his race, and in him his line was extinguished in imbecility. Feeble in mind and in body, he had few of the characteristics of the Bourbon house, none of their virtues, and none of their vices save that of gluttony; and in him merged a double strain of the strongly impressing Stewart blood; for by his father he was descended from Charles I. and by his mother from Elizabeth, the sister of Charles I. The daughter of Charles I. and Henrietta Maria of France was Henrietta Maria, who married Philippe Duc d'Orléans, brother of Louis XIV. Their daughter was Anne Marie Aloisia, wife of the King of Sicily and Sardinia; and her daughter was Marie Adélaïde, who married Louis Duc de Bourgogne, the father of Louis XV. The Princess Elizabeth (sister of Charles I.) married Frederick V., the Elector Palatine. She had many children, of whom Rupert and Maurice are best known, Sophia (through whom George I. reigned) and Edward, whose daughter was Benedicta, Duchess of Hanover. Her daughter was Wilhelmina who married Joseph I. of Austria, and had a daughter, Marie Josèphe, wife of Frederick Augustus of Saxony, King of Poland. Their daughter married Louis, the sickly son of Louis XV.; and Louis XVI. was their offspring, uniting the two lines.

It is beyond the province of these notes to discuss the question whether the inheritance of any marked hereditary traits is really stronger in one mentally and physically weak, or merely shown in a more pronounced and unmistakable form than they would be in a normal man. Either assumption is a fresh proof of the bodily and mental incapacity of Louis XVI.

APPENDIX III.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR TREATY OF COMMERCE

BETWEEN AUSTRIA AND THE UNITED STATES.

Nos Josephus Secundus Divina favente Clementia electus Romanorum semper Augustus, Germaniæ, Hierosolymæ, Hungariæ, Bohemiæ, Dalmatiæ, Croatiæ, Slavoniæ, Galiciæ et Lodomeriæ Rex, Archidux Austriæ, Dux Burgundiæ, Lotharingiæ, Styriæ, Corinthiæ et Carniolæ, Magnux Dux Heturiæ, Magnus Princeps Transylvaniæ, Marchio Moraviæ, Dux Brabantiæ Limburgi, Lucemburgi et Geldriæ, Wurtembergæ, Superioris et Inferioris Silesiæ, Mediolani, Mantuæ, Parmæ, Piacentiæ, Guastallæ, Osrecinæ et Zatoriæ, Calabriæ, Barri, Montisferrati et Teschinæ, Princeps Sueviæ et Carolopolis; Comes Hapsburgi, Flandriæ, Tyrolis, Hannoniæ, Kiburgi, Goritiæ et Gradisciæ, Marchio Sacri Romani Imperii Burgoviæ,

We, Joseph the Second, by the favour of the Divine Clemency Elected Emperor of the Romans, ever August, King of Germany, Jerusalem, Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia and Lodomeria, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, of Lotharingia, of Styria, of Carinthia, and of Carniola, Grand Duke of Tuscany, High Prince of Transylvania, Marquess of Moravia, Duke of Brabant, of Limburg, of Luxemburg and Guelder, of Wurtemberg, of Upper and Lower Silesia, of Milan, of Mantua, of Parma, of Piacenza, of Guastalla, of Osrecina and Zatoria, of Calabria, of Bar, of Montferrat and of Teschen, Prince of Swabia, and of Charleville, Count of Hapsburg, of Flanders, of Tyrol, of Hainault, of Kyburg,

Superioris et Inferioris Lusatiæ, Mussiponti, et Novienti [1] Comes Namurei, Provinciæ, Valdemontii, Albimontii, Zütphaniæ, Sarwerdæ, Salmæ et Falkenstenii, Dominus Marchiæ Slavoniæ et Mechlinæ,

of Görtz and of Gradiscia, Marquess of the Holy Roman Empire, of Burgau, of Upper and Lower Lusatia, of Pont à Mousson, and of Ebersheim, Count of Namur, of Provence, of Vaudemont, of Blamont, of Zutphen, of Saurweden, of Salm, and of Falkenstein, Lord of the Marches of Slavonia and Mechlin,

Notum testatumque omnibus singulis quorum interest, ter præsentium facimus :—

Do by these presents make known and testify to all and each whom it concerns, as follows :—

Magnifici ordines fœderati Americani, agnito universim illimitato, nulliusque Potestati obnoxio Illorum Dominatio, certiores Nos reddiderint, cum primis se in votis habere, ut Illis quæ Nos cum reliquis Christiani nominis Regnis et Ditionibus conjungunt amicitæ vinculis illigentur, atque insimul, quæ ad promovenda mutuæ Commerciorum commoda conducere possent, ejus conventionis desuper pangendæ legibus definiantur.

Whereas the Magnificent United States of America whose Sovereign Power is universally recognised as unlimited and subject to the Power of no man, have informed us that they specially desire to be bound to us by ties of friendship such as those that unite us to the other Kings and States of Christendom, and at the same time promote the mutual advantages of Commerce by defining these in specific terms of a treaty thereon to be ratified.

Nos igitur justo adeo Nostrisque animi sensibus plane conformi desiderio lubenter

We therefore willingly assenting to so just a desire and one so entirely in conformity with

[1] The text of the Treaty gives *Nomenei*, a name impossible to identify. It is, no doubt, intended for *Novienti*, *Novientum* in Alsace = Ebersheim.

annuentes, Consilium cepmus, Virum Illustrem et Magnificum, fidelem Nobis Dilectum Florimundum Comitem à Mercy Argenteau Aurei Velleris necnon Ordinis Sti Stephani Regis Apostolici Magnæ Crucis Equitem Nobis a Cubiculis Secretioribusque Status Conciliis denominare plenamque Illi facultatem impertiri, sicuti Illi hisce impertimur, qui cum supra commemoratorum Ordinum fœderatorum Americanorum Ministro vel Ministris plenæ itidem facultate munito vel munitis, desuper consilia, conferat, concludat; et an Tabulas redacta signet:

Verbo nostro Cesareo Regio et Archiducali spondentes Nos ea omnia, quæ dictus Comes a Mercy Argenteau Orator Noster ad aulam Serenissimi æ Potentissimi Galliarum Regis, cujus compertæ fidei, integritati et longo rerum dextere gerendarum usui plurimum confidimus, sic egerit, concluserit et signarit ruta gradaque habituros et Ratihabitionis quoque Nostræ Tabulas convento tempore extradi jussuros esse.

In cujus rei fidem majusque

the sentiments of Our mind, have resolved to appoint Our Illustrious, Eminent, faithful and beloved Florimond Count of Mercy Argenteau, Knight of the Golden Fleece and of the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Stephen the Apostolic King, our Chamberlain and Secretary of the Council of State, and to bestow on him as We do by these presents full powers to deliberate thereon and to make a treaty with the Minister or Ministers of the above mentioned United States of America, empowered with the same powers to confer, conclude, reduce to writing and sign what they may jointly resolve:

We pledging our Imperial, Royal and Archducal word that we will ratify and confirm all that may have been done, concluded and signed by the said Count of Mercy Argenteau, our Ambassador at the Court of the most Serene and Powerful King of France, in whose tried fidelity, integrity, and long practice in skilled management of affairs we have the greatest confidence, and will order Our Letters of Ratification to be issued at the time agreed on.

In witness whereof, and for

robur hasce Plenipotentiarum Tabulas manu Nostra Subscripsimus, sigilloque Nostro majori pendente, firmari jussimus Dabantur in Civitate Nostra Viennæ die 7mæ Martii anno millesimo septingentesimo, octogesimo sexto Regnorum Nostrorum Romano Germanici vigesimo secundo, hereditariorum sexto,

JOSEPHUS.

Ad mandatum Sacæ. Cæsæ. ac Regiæ Apostolicæ Majestatis proprium.

ANTONIUS v. SPIELMANN.

Plenipotentiæ Cæsæ. Regiæ pro Illustri et Magnifico Comite à Mercy Argenteau cum Ministris à fœderatis Americæ Statibus designandis ad comercii mutui Tractatum concludendum.

the greater corroboration of these presents appointing him our Minister Plenipotentiary we have signed these with our own hand, and have commanded them to be confirmed by appending thereto Our Great Seal, given in our City of Vienna on the 7th day of March in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six, the twenty-second of our Roman and German reigns and the sixth of our reign in our hereditary Dominions,

JOSEPH.

By special command of his Sacred, Imperial, Royal and Apostolic Majesty.

ANTONIUS v. SPIELMANN.

Full Powers Imperial and Royal to the Illustrious and Eminent Count of Mercy Argenteau for the concluding of a treaty of mutual relations with Ministers to be appointed by the United States of America.

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